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THE ESCAPE FROM THE BURNING MOUNTAIN.—*Page 180.*

FORTUNE HUNTERS OF THE PHILIPPINES

OR

The Treasure of the Burning Mountain

BY

LOUIS CHARLES

AUTHOR OF "THE LAND OF FIRE," ETC.



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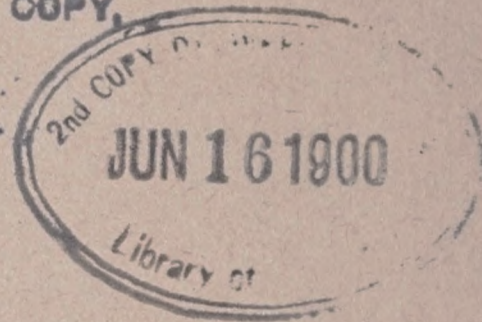
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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. MY BROTHERS, MYSELF, AND OUR GUARDIAN,	I
II. THE BRASS-BOUND BOX,	7
III. WHAT THE BOX CONTAINED,	14
IV. WE COME TO A DETERMINATION,	20
V. A QUARREL IN THE SUMMER HOUSE,	27
VI. IN WHICH I BORROW A SLOOP,	33
VII. ON THE WAY TO SAN FRANCISCO,	40
VIII. ON THE WAY TO MANILA,	46
IX. A TRIP INTO THE INTERIOR,	52
X. PANDO KOLO,	62
XI. ABDUCTION OF OLIVER,	71
XII. A NATIVE BIRTHDAY PARTY,	80
XIII. A STRANGE ADVENTURE,	87
XIV. A FRESH START,	96
XV. WITH THE KAHU,	108
XVI. OFF FOR THE BURNING MOUNTAIN,	118
XVII. THINGS THAT HAPPENED,	123
XVIII. A NARROW ESCAPE,	136
XIX. WHAT BOEZ TRIED TO DO,	146
XX. OFF FOR THE TREASURE-CAVE,	156
XXI. THE TREASURE-CAVE,	165
XXII. A STRANGE MEETING,	176
XXIII. I GET INTO TROUBLE,	188
XXIV. ROBBED OF THE DIAMONDS,	199
XXV. HOME AGAIN—CONCLUSION,	209

FORTUNE HUNTERS OF THE PHILIPPINES.

CHAPTER I.

MY BROTHERS, MYSELF, AND OUR GUARDIAN.

"It's an outrage!" came from Oliver.

"I don't intend to stand it," added Don.

"Well, what are you going to do about it," I asked, as calmly as I could.

"I—I'm going to run away," answered Oliver determinedly. "Mr. Narcross shan't treat me like this—no, sirree!"

"It's easy enough to talk about running away," said Don. "But how are you going to do it when you are a prisoner in such a hole as this?"

"Never mind—I'm going to run away, and that settles it."

"We might as well be in a regular prison as in here," I continued, glancing around at the bare brick walls which surrounded us. "Mr. Nar-

cross don't intend us to get away—not if he knows it.”

“What do you suppose will be his next move?” asked Don, with some anxiety.

“I don't know. Perhaps he'll send us to court for trial.”

“But we didn't take his money.”

“I know that as well as you do.”

“I think if anybody took the money it was that Cal Bender,” said Oliver. “He's a bad egg—you can see it in his eyes.”

“Right you are there!” I cried. “Cal Bender is a sneak—and worse. I don't see how Mr. Narcross allows him around.”

“We didn't touch that money—and I am not going to suffer for another's crime!” burst out Oliver. “I'll turn the whole ranch upside down before I'll submit.” And I really believe Oliver meant what he said.

We were three brothers—Oliver, Don, and Frank Folsom. Oliver was the oldest, Don next, and I the youngest, but there was hardly three years' difference between the three of us.

Two years before a terrible disaster at sea had robbed us of our parents. At that time the three of us were attending Chiros Academy in California, our parents having gone on a trip to the Philippine Islands,

The blow was a terrible one, and for several months we knew not what to do. Then Mr. Narcross, who had been our father's business partner, came forward and became our guardian. At first he left us at the academy, but a year later he made us give up schooling and come to live with him at his home in Oceanville.

I think, on the whole, Mr. Narcross meant to do what was fair by us. But he was a strange man, given to violent outbursts of temper, and became angry over the most trivial things. As we boys liked fun we were continually "in hot water" with him.

But all went well, comparatively speaking, until one day there was missing from his desk a pocket-book containing fifty dollars. On the very day the money was discovered to be gone, my brothers and I had bought a new football with some savings of several weeks. Oliver had also bought a football suit with some money received for doing odd jobs for a neighbor.

At once Mr. Narcross, always hasty and now in a terrible rage over the loss of his money, accused us boys of taking the pocketbook.

"You took it, and spent part of the money for that football stuff," he declared.

"We didn't take it!" cried Oliver.

"You did!" shrieked our guardian,

"We haven't seen the pocketbook," put in Don.

"We are not thieves," I added.

A wordy war followed, which ended when Mr. Narcross leaped upon Oliver and bore him to the floor.

"I'll make you confess!" he cried. "I won't have such work going on in this home!"

Neither Don nor I would stand by and see our brother abused, and both of us leaped in, and for several minutes Mr. Narcross got the worst of the struggle, as we hauled him off by the legs and bumped him severely on the floor of the dining room.

But then our guardian called in Chin Lee, his Chinese servant, and Patrick the barn man, and between the three men we were made prisoners and our hands were tied behind us.

"Now I'll fix them," muttered Mr. Narcross. "Mind them until I come back."

He went into the cellar and we heard him hammering away for the best part of quarter of an hour.

When he returned he was covered with dirt, but there was a smile of grim satisfaction on his face.

"I've opened up the old wine-vault," he said to Patrick, "We'll lock them up in that."

"But," Oliver had protested, "you haven't any right——"

"Shut up, boy!" stormed our guardian. "I have a right to treat thieves as I please. Perhaps you'll hear more of this matter before long. Take them below."

In spite of our struggles, Oliver, Don, and myself were forced down the cellar stairs, and then led along to where a great oaken door separated it from the wine-vault our guardian had mentioned.

The vault had not been used for years, and was as dismal a hole as one could well imagine.

"In you go," had been Mr. Narcross' last words. "I'll show you that I am master here, and not one of you shall have anything to eat or to drink until you confess where you have put the pocketbook and the balance of that money."

"We can't confess, because we don't know," had been Oliver's final reply. "Some day, Mr. Narcross, you will rue this work, mind what I say."

Then the heavy oaken door was slammed shut and bolted, and we were left in utter darkness. For several minutes we sat silent; then came the conversation with which I have opened my story.

"No matter how you look at it, we are in a

pickle," said Don. "I can't see a thing, can either of you?"

Neither of us could. "He don't mean that we shall see anything," I said.

"Back up to me, Don, and untie my hands," said Oliver, and Don did as requested. Then Oliver liberated Don and me.

"One move toward liberty," said my oldest brother grimly. "Now, has anybody got a match?"

"I haven't," came from Don.

"Here is one—just one," I answered. "Be careful how you strike it. Have you a bit of paper to light?"

Oliver had a story paper, and crumpled up one of the sheets. Then came a faint scratch or two, followed by a tiny blaze. Soon the paper was ablaze and flaming like a torch.

"It's a pity it won't last," began Don, when I uttered a cry of delight.

"A candle! Somebody has forgotten a candle in here!"

I was right—a candle lay almost at my feet, the end stuck into the mouth of an empty wine-bottle. We quickly lighted the candle, and then set to work to examine the prison into which our guardian had cast us.

CHAPTER II.

THE BRASS-BOUND BOX.

APPARENTLY there was but little to be seen. The wine-vault was bare but for two empty vats which lay in one corner, half fallen to pieces and smelling vilely.

There was nothing in the shape of a window to the place, and the only ventilation was through half a dozen small round holes in the heavy oaken door.

"Not a pleasant outlook, eh?" was Oliver's comment.

"Pleasant?" I cried. "It's horribly disagreeable, Oliver. What in the world are we to do?"

"Get out," he said laconically.

"I've heard that before."

"But I do mean to get out, Frank, and that is all there is to it," he persisted.

"Well, I am with you—if you can point the way."

"He means to get out when Mr. Narcross lets us out," said Don, trying to joke, but none of us were in a humor to appreciate it.

"No, I mean to get out before that. Do you think I am going to die of hunger and thirst?"

"Do you think he will really let it go as far as that?" asked Don.

"Why not? You both know how stubborn and headstrong he is."

"We can have him arrested for it."

"And he'll swear we took his pocketbook, and have us sent to the penitentiary, or House of Reform, or something like that."

Again we took a look around the wine-vault and tried the door.

It was bolted top and bottom, and refused to budge.

"No escape in that direction," said Oliver. He took the candle and began to inspect the walls with care. "Hullo, what does this mean!" he cried presently.

"What does what mean?" came from Don and I in a breath.

"Here is something that looks like a doorway bricked up, and over it are the initials 'V. O. M.' I wonder what 'V. O. M.' stands for?"

We stood in silence for a moment.

"I know what it is," said Don, winking at me.

"What?" asked Oliver.

"That is to be Mr. Narcross' funeral-vault



I THOUGHT IT WOULD SHOW US THE WAY TO THE OUTER WORLD.—Page 9.

when he dies. 'V. O. M.' stands for 'Vicious Old Mule.' "

We could not help but laugh at this, and while we laughed we drew closer and began to pick at the brickwork, which seemed to be loose. All at once half a dozen bricks fell down, revealing a black hole beyond.

"Hullo, we're getting to somewhere!" cried Oliver. "Let us see if we can't enlarge that hole enough for a passageway."

All set to work willingly. Bricks and mortar seemed to be very loose, and in less than half an hour we had the stuff piled in a heap and there was revealed a small archway leading to a second vault, about one-third the size of that which we occupied.

"Too bad—I thought it would show us the way to the outer world," said Oliver, taking up the candle again. "But, come, let us go through and see what is on the other side."

He crawled ahead, with the candle, and Oliver and I came after him. Cobwebs were thick, and Oliver began to grumble.

"I'm catching them all," he said. "I should have let you go ahead."

"That's all right—you're the leader of this funeral," laughed Don. "Take care you don't drop into some hole. Remember, we are close

to the side of the hill—if I know anything about it.”

Soon the three of us stood in the second vault, which was wet and filled with an odor far from agreeable.

“I don’t believe Mr. Narcross knows of this vault,” I said, as I looked around.

“It’s not likely. You know this house once belonged to some Spanish families—folks who came from the Philippines, I believe. They used to have large quantities of wine, I reckon. They got out when California was annexed to the United States.”

“Well, I don’t care who lived here, if only we can find a way out,” I said.

Again we began to inspect the walls, and soon came upon a second archway, which was bricked up like the other, and just as loosely. At once Oliver pulled out several bricks.

“Hurrah! daylight!” he cried.

He was right; from a considerable distance we could see the light of day, coming from a bend in a tunnel which, later on, proved to be nearly five hundred feet in length.

“I never dreamed the old ranch had so much of mystery about it!” exclaimed Don. “I wonder what we’ll stumble upon next?”

“Don’t crow until we are out of the

woods," said Oliver. "If we—— What is this?"

Oliver stopped short and bent to the ground, for the vault had a dirt flooring. His foot had touched a ring of brass, much tarnished by the rust of years.

"A ring," said I, and tried to pick it up, to find that it was fastened to a small slab of rock. Pulling with all my might, I brought up the rock, revealing underneath an aperture about twelve inches square and almost as deep.

"More mysteries!" ejaculated Don, and leaning over the hole he brought forth a brass-bound box. "Hurrah, boys, I've struck a fortune!"

"Whack, if you have!" I answered, and Oliver said "whack" too, not but what we always divided up anything that came to us.

The box was almost the size of the hole. It was of some hard wood much the worse for dampness and age. The brass bands almost covered it, and it was tightly shut.

"I don't see any way to open it," said Don, turning it over.

"No keyhole?" I queried.

"Nothing."

"But there must be some way to open it," put in Oliver. "Look again—or, here, take the candle, and I'll look."

Don took the light, and Oliver made a minute inspection. But it was useless—there was nothing in the shape of a keyhole to the box.

“Stumped,” growled my oldest brother.

“Is the thing solid?” I asked. “Shake it.”

Oliver did as I requested. No, it was hollow, and inside we could hear the rattle of something hard.

“Old Spanish gold—I’ll wager a new hat!” cried Don. “I wonder how much?”

“The box couldn’t contain over a thousand or two,” I returned.

“Not as much as that—by the weight,” put in Oliver. “But let us go on. That candle won’t last more than ten or fifteen minutes longer.”

“But I want to see what is in the box,” grumbled Don.

Nevertheless, he followed Oliver and me along the tunnel. It was a small, uncomfortable place, and before the end was gained we had to come to a halt.

“It’s going to be a tight squeeze,” said Oliver. “But I reckon we can make it.”

Putting out the candle, he fell flat and moved along like a snake, shoving the box before him. Silently Don and I came after him. The dirt almost blinded and choked us, but we kept on, and

five minutes later came out into the daylight, at a point between two big rocks, and well surrounded by trees and bushes.

We were free at last.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT THE BOX CONTAINED.

I THINK it is time I mentioned something concerning the location of our guardian's home.

It was a large place, having been built fully sixty years before the opening of my story. It was of brick and stone, and in the Spanish style of the past century.

The house, or ranch as we boys termed it, sat on something of a hill, with a lawn sloping down to a cliff overlooking the river.

To the left of the house was a second hill, backed up by a heavy wood.

There was a path through the wood, and this brought one to the highway leading to San Francisco. Oceanville proper lay half a mile in the opposite direction.

Our guardian was fairly well-to-do, and having retired from his business in San Francisco was now interested in a sheep-ranch just beyond Oceanville.

"Where are we?" asked Don, as he rubbed

the dirt from his eyes. "Ugh, what a nasty crawl that was!"

"We are in the woods on the side hill," said Oliver. "Don't you see the river below us?"

"By jinks! and I thought we were coming out back of the ranch."

"The passageway had a turn in it," I put in. "I'm glad we didn't come out back of the house. If we had, Patrick might have collared us."

"I don't believe a soul about the place knows of that passageway," said Oliver.

"No, but they will know of it when they come to look for us," said Don. "And it won't do for us to remain around here, either—unless we want to fall into Mr. Narcross' clutches again."

"Nevermore!" cried Oliver semi-tragically. "Henceforth I am a free man!"

"What's the matter with being a free boy," said Don.

"It's the same thing, my child." Oliver swung around on his heel. "Do you fellows mean to give yourselves up?" he asked quickly.

"No!" came in unison from Don and me; and the three of us shook hands.

"If the box contains a fortune let us go into the broad world and reap the benefit thereof," said Don, with a grandiloquent wave of his hand.

"Done," said Oliver, and I nodded.

Leaving the vicinity of the rocks, the three of us made our way through the brush to the top of the second hill.

Here there was a summer-house, but the building was fast falling into decay.

But we boys went there frequently, and had many odds-and-ends of boyish possessions treasured up there.

"I wish I had a hat," said Don, as we moved along. "I don't want to start out into the world bareheaded."

"There are several old hats and caps up at the Retreat," I said. They are not very good, but they'll be better than nothing."

"Right you are, Frank," said Don. "And after we have broken open that box and got hold of the gold inside we can all buy silk stovepipes, eh?"

We laughed and pushed on, and soon the Retreat, as we called the old summer-house, was gained. No one was around, and going inside we took possession. The Retreat was well shaded with trees, and far below us glinted the waters of the broad river.

"Won't Mr. Narcross be mad when he finds us gone?" said Oliver.

"And won't he be mystified when he can't find out where we have gone to?" added Don.

"He'll do his best to catch us," I said. "If we are really going away it won't do to remain here too long."

"The thing of it is—where are we to go?" asked my oldest brother.

"The box—open the box first!" cried Don.

We were all willing enough to do that. But how to open the thing was a question.

One after another tried his best to pull the cover back. Then Oliver got out his penknife and pushed it into a slit he had discovered. Instantly the cover fell back as if by magic, being worked by a spring.

We all started forward, to behold a chamois bag and a roll of parchment, along with a bundle of letters.

"The gold!" cried Don, seizing the bag. He pulled open the string and turned the bag up, and down to our feet dropped just sixty large golden pieces of old Spanish money and three diamond rings.

"Sixty!" said Oliver, counting the pieces. "I don't know what they are worth, but I guess we have at least five hundred dollars here, not counting the diamond rings, which, if they are genuine, ought to be worth two or three hundred more."

For the time being all of us forgot the parch-

ment and the bundle of letters. Soon we divided the gold pieces and the rings evenly.

"We'll do that, so if we become separated each will have his share," said Oliver.

"We are not going to become separated," I said. "We must stick together."

"Yes, we'll stick together," said Don. "But, say, where are we going to get good money for this stuff—I mean money we can pass here?"

"We can have it exchanged down in San Francisco," said Oliver. "It will not be difficult."

Having cooled down a little over the finding of the money and rings, we turned our attention to the parchment and the bundle of letters. The parchment was in two parts, and one part contained something of a rude map, drawn in red ink, with here and there a red cross. The other portion contained some writing in Spanish, of which I could make out only the single word, Manila.

"This is all Greek to me," said I.

"It's Greek to me, too," said Don. "Oliver, can't you spell it out? You know a little Spanish."

"Oh, I suppose I can try," grumbled my oldest brother. "But I don't believe the thing amounts to anything."

"Maybe it is an old land-grant," I suggested.

"If it is it is probably outlawed long since," said Oliver. "See, here is a date—1796. Say, but this is old."

He began to spell out the document, which was much faded. At first he showed but little interest, but presently his eyes began to open and he read on with great eagerness.

"Well, what is it?" demanded Don impatiently.

"Wait just a minute," replied Oliver, and then, as he finished the document, he drew a long breath. "Well, I never!"

"What?" Don and I both cried.

"This document tells of a hidden treasure of diamonds, said to be secreted near the burning mountain, Kiwoku, on the island of Luzon, of the Philippines. It declares the treasure to be worth nearly one hundred thousand dollars!"

CHAPTER IV.

WE COME TO A DETERMINATION.

“ A DIAMOND treasure! ” I gasped.

“ Worth one hundred thousand dollars! ” ejaculated Don. “ Oh, Oliver, you are telling us a fairy story! ”

“ All right, then, read the document for yourself,” answered my oldest brother.

But neither of us could do that, and we both begged him to read the parchment once more, and translate it as he went along.

This Oliver did, with many a halt, for, as I said before, his knowledge of Spanish was none of the best.

The gist of the document was that, years before, a certain Tagal chief of the island of Luzon, named Kolo the Rich, had obtained a large quantity of diamonds from a Malay pirate-ship which had been wrecked on the northwest coast of the island. The diamonds had, at the death of Kolo the Rich, been turned over to his son, Kolo the Spear-eye, and this son had secreted them in a large cave of the burning mountain Kiwoku.

There were numerous directions for reaching the burning mountain, the trail leading through a country inhabited by a wild tribe of the Tagals called the Kana, meaning the eye-eaters, for in years gone by these people had been cannibals, and their greatest feast had been one of human eyes!

On the back of the parchment we were surprised to find some writing in English, showing that a certain Victor O. Munn had once searched for the treasure, but before finding it had been stricken with tropical fever and compelled to return to the United States.

"I am satisfied that the treasure is there," wrote this man. "The natives occasionally talk about it, but dread going to the burning mountain, for they say that the ghost of a certain King Bili rules the mountain and will burn up anybody who touches the treasure. I found this out through Pando Kolo, one of the head spearmen of the Kanas, or Ingorotes. He wants the treasure very much, but is afraid to go for it. May somebody who finds this statement be more successful in the hunt than was I."

There was more than this, to the effect that Victor Munn was a single man, without relatives, and had gone to the Philippines more for adventure than anything.

"If I had a family I would fit out an expedition to hunt for the treasure," he wrote. "But I am alone and leave this to whomsoever may find it."

And underneath all this writing were the words, heavily underscored:

"Look for the cat's-eye set in the white rock."

"Look for the cat's-eye set in the white rock!" cried Don. "What does Victor O. Munn mean by that?"

"It must be a sign at the opening to the treasure cave," said I. "The cat's-eye may be a very precious stone."

"Now we know what V. O. M. stood for at the entrance to the vault," said Oliver. "They are the initials of Mr. Munn's name."

"Did you ever hear of him?" asked Don.

"Why, yes, father used to tell of him. He was an old California pioneer and a great hunter. He once killed a man in an election quarrel, and he had to leave between two days, as the saying is."

"Do you believe in this treasure?" I asked soberly.

"I do!" cried both of my brothers simultaneously.

"Then we had better go in search of it."

"Done!" cried Don, who always made up his mind to a thing on the spot. Then both he and I looked at Oliver.

"Humph! that would be a big undertaking," mused our older brother. "Do you know how far the island of Luzon is from here?"

"Almost to China," I answered.

"Not quite, but it's six thousand miles. And then we know very little of Luzon excepting that it is a Spanish colony, inhabited partly by Spaniards, Germans, and Americans, with thousands of partly civilized and savage natives living in the interior."

"Never mind, we can find out in the atlas, and through other books," said Don.

"You won't find much," I answered. "The whole Philippines are a mere lot of dots in my geography." And that was true, for at this time we had had no war with Spain, and we took no more interest in the Philippines than we did in any of the other colonies belonging to foreign nations.

"Do you mean to say you won't go and hunt for this treasure?" demanded Don.

"Oh, no, I don't say that. But I do say that finding it will be no easy matter."

"Never mind; we have the whole world before

us," said Oliver, with a strange look of determination coming into his face. "And we are settled that we won't remain with Mr. Narcross."

"Yes, that's settled!" cried both Don and I.

"Then we go to Luzon. Hurrah for the Diamond Treasure!"

The three of us gave a cheer, and Don began to caper about the old summer-house as if possessed.

"We'll come back rich!" he ejaculated. "And then we'll snap our fingers at old Narcross."

The three of us sat in the summer-house for fully two hours talking over our plans.

We arranged that we would remain around the place until nightfall and then sneak down to the river and board the *Golden Spade*, a small vessel running to San Francisco direct.

Once in San Francisco we would exchange the old Spanish money for United States currency, and then procure passage on a steamer or sailing boat for Manila, the chief city of the island of Luzon.

If we could not get passage to Luzon, we would take passage to some port in China and from there take another boat to the island of the treasure.

We were all deeply interested, and almost felt as if that Diamond Treasure was already in our

grasp. Alas! little did we dream of all the perils in store for us while on our dangerous mission!

"I know Captain Frankson of the *Golden Spade* quite well," said Oliver. "He was a good friend to father. I think he will tell us all he can, if we ask him."

"I wouldn't ask a soul around here," put in Don. "Ten chances to one, Captain Frankson would consider it his duty to hand us over to Mr. Narcross."

"Don is right," I broke in. "He would say that for three boys to set off on such a hunt would be the wildest kind of nonsense."

"All right, then; we won't say a word to anybody till we get to San Francisco," said our oldest brother, and so it was settled.

By this time it was well along in the afternoon, and all hands were tremendously hungry. How to get something to eat was a problem.

"I wonder if I can't sneak up to the house on the sly?" I said. "If anybody sees me I can run for it, you know."

"It's pretty risky," said Oliver. "Still, I think we ought to do something. But why not go down to the town for something? I've got thirty cents with me. That will buy a lot of stuff fit to eat without cooking."

"All right, then, I'll go to the town," I said.

“Be sure and bring a pie,” put in Don. “I can’t do without a——” He broke off short. “Great Jee-rusalem! Here comes Cal Bender up from the river!”

All of us sprang forward and looked out toward the stream below us. Don was right; Cal Bender had tied up in a small sloop belonging to Mr. Narcross, and was coming up the steep path leading directly to our hiding-place!



“ HERE COMES CAL BENDER UP FROM THE RIVER ! ” — *Page 26.*

CHAPTER V.

A QUARREL IN THE SUMMER-HOUSE.

I THINK it is time that I introduce Cal Bender to the reader, for this individual was destined to play a most important part in the trip to Luzon after the Diamond Treasure.

Cal Bender was a tall, thin man of forty. He had once been a sailor, but had given up the sea to try his fortunes in the gold mines of California.

He was a dark-eyed, scheming fellow, with a smooth tongue; and by his oily talk had induced our guardian to go into several mining ventures of a very hazardous nature. Although we did not know it at the time, we afterward learned that these ventures had all collapsed but a day or two before the trouble with Mr. Narcross which led to our being confined in the old wine-vault.

I could never understand Cal Bender's influence over our guardian, but it was a fact that Bender had the whole run of the home, and of the sheep-

ranch, and that Mr. Narcross trusted him far more than he deserved.

All of us boys felt certain that Bender had taken our guardian's money, yet it would have been impossible to prove it, had we been taken to a court of law for that purpose. The man was a downright sneak, and we could see it even if our guardian could not.

But if we hated Bender, he likewise hated us, and we felt that he would like nothing better than to get us into trouble if he could do it.

I might as well add here that in some of his mining adventures Cal Bender had had a partner, a Spaniard named Alfredo Boez. This Boez was even a worse villain than Bender, and long after the adventures of which I am going to tell took place we discovered that Boez was wanted for several crimes committed in Cuba, for he had once been a tobacco-planter on that island. From something Mr. Narcross had said, we were led to believe that Cal Bender and Alfredo Boez were no longer as friendly as they had been in days gone by.

"What shall we do?" asked Oliver, as we watched the approach of Cal Bender.

"We had better hide," said Don. "If he sees us he will surely tell old Narcross."

"I don't believe in running away from Ben-

der," I put in. "I believe it is he who has got us in this trouble. I've a good mind to tax him with taking the pocketbook."

"By Jove, dare we do that?" cried Oliver.

"I dare."

"Then let us do it, Frank."

"No use of talking—you fellows have nerve!" came from Don.

"Won't you stick by us?" I asked.

"I will—to the end. And this for Mr. Cal Bender, if he gets too impertinent."

As Don finished he picked up a good-sized stick lying near. Seeing this Oliver and I also armed ourselves.

By this time Cal Bender was close at hand, and in a moment more he stepped to the old summer-house door. He had one hand in a side pocket of his jacket and something stuck out at the corner of the pocket—something which I felt must be the end of our guardian's pocketbook!

"Wha—what, you!" cried the man, as he caught sight of us, and for the instant I thought he was going to retreat.

"Cal Bender, what brings you here?" demanded Oliver.

"Me? Haven't I a right to come here if I want to?" was the sharp return, as Bender began to recover himself.

"I suppose you have."

"I—I thought you were locked up?" went on the man. "Mr. Narcross told me he had put you in a wine-vault for stealing."

"Cal Bender!" I cried, "you took that pocket-book!"

"Me!" he thundered, but turned white.

"Yes, you."

"Why, you rascal——"

"It is in your pocket now!" I went on triumphantly.

He fell back as if I had struck him a blow.

"In his pocket?" came from my two brothers. "Are you sure, Frank?"

"Yes—don't you see it sticking out?" I returned, and pointed with my hand.

"You—you are mistaken," stammered Bender, turning from white to red. "I never took a thing that wasn't mine. I've a good mind to cowhide you for saying so."

"Better try it on," I answered boldly.

He looked at the three of us, and at the sticks we had picked up.

"I'll fix you!" he snarled, and started to leave the summer-house.

As quick as lightning Oliver, who had learned the trick at school, put out his foot and sent Cal Bender sprawling. Then before the man could

arise, we all fell upon him and held him down.

He roared like a bull, but it was no use, and as we held him, I put my hand in his pocket and pulled out the pocketbook in question.

"Here it is!" I cried triumphantly. "What did I tell you!"

"I don't know anything about a pocketbook," said the man sullenly.

"But I just took it out of your pocket."

"No, you didn't."

"He did!" cried Don and Oliver.

"It's no use to deny it," said I.

"See what is in it," said Oliver. "We'll hold him down. If you don't lay still I'll crack you on the head," he added to the prisoner.

I opened the pocketbook, to find that it contained just one five-dollar bill and a sheet of note-paper. The note-paper contained several lines of handwriting, of no importance, signed by Oliver.

"One of your notes!" I said. "How did this get here?"

"I know," came from Don. "Bender put it there. He was going to leave that pocketbook in the summer-house and then let Mr. Narcross find it and thus put the guilt on your shoulders."

By the way Cal Bender squirmed we could see that Don had struck the nail on the head.

"It's a plot against me!" howled Cal, but before he could say more Oliver jerked him to his feet and gave him a stinging box on the ear.

"You miserable sharper!" cried my oldest brother. "So you would lay your crime at my door, eh? Take that!" And he gave Bender another blow, on the other ear.

This second blow made Cal Bender wild with rage, and breaking loose he sprang back into a corner of the summer-house. But we were between him and the door and windows, so he could not escape.

"Let me go!" he hissed.

"We will not," replied Oliver.

"You must. If you don't you will be sorry for it."

"You shall go to prison," put in Don.

Scarcely had my brother spoken when Cal Bender whipped a pistol from his pocket and pointed it at Don's head.

"Out of my way, or I will fire," he hissed. "I am not to be balked by three good-for-nothing boys."

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH I BORROW A SLOOP.

THE situation was certainly a thrilling one, for none of us had ever had a pistol pointed at him before, and Cal Bender looked just reckless enough to do almost anything.

"Put down that pistol," said Oliver as steadily as he could.

"I won't. You let me pass," answered Bender.

He was facing Oliver and Don, and for the moment I seemed to be forgotten.

I think that moment was our salvation, for raising my stick I brought it down with all force on his arm, nearly breaking the elbow.

The pistol fell with a clatter to the floor, and Bender uttered a yell that could have been heard quarter of a mile away.

"Make him a prisoner, boys!" I shouted, and then Oliver and Don rushed in, and a fierce hand-to-hand struggle ensued which lasted for the best part of ten minutes.

At the end of that time Oliver hit Bender on

the head, and the rascal went over on his back as if shot.

"Great Scott, have you killed him!" gasped Don.

"No, he is only unconscious," I answered, as I knelt at Bender's side. "What shall we do next?"

That was a conundrum, but at last, making certain that the man was fast coming to himself, we decided to tie his hands and feet, that he might not cause us any more trouble.

He was opening his eyes when the last of the knots was fastened.

"Oh," he groaned, and tried to sit up. "You scamps!"

"Lie where you are, Bender," said Oliver sternly. "You are our prisoner."

"Prisoner!"

"Yes."

"Let me go at once!"

Again he tried to get free, but speedily found himself unable to move. Then Don picked up the pistol and pointed it at the rascal's head.

"Now be quiet, or I'll do some shooting," he said, and at once Bender became as mute as a stone.

We questioned him as to what Mr. Narcross was doing, but could not get a word out of him.

He saw the brass-bound box and eyed it curiously, but said nothing concerning it. He also saw the parchment, which had fallen to the ground during the struggle.

Drawing a little to one side, we discussed the situation in a low tone, and Don urged that I go to the town and buy something to eat.

"What's the matter with taking the sloop?" said Oliver, and so it was arranged.

Leaving my two brothers in charge of our prisoner, if such Bender might be called, I stole down the path leading to the broad river.

It was growing dark, and reaching the river bank I soon discovered that not a soul was in sight.

The *Sprite* had once belonged to my father, and was as trim a craft as could be found anywhere.

Going aboard, I ran up the mainsail and the jib, and with a stiff breeze blowing was soon on my way to Oceanville—certainly an odd name for a town that did not face the ocean at all, but was on a river—several miles from its mouth, too.

I knew all about handling a sloop, so the trip to the town did not bother me in the least.

Tying up at one of the public wharves, I ran up to the main store and soon invested the thirty cents in such things as we had decided to get.

As I was leaving the store I saw Alfredo Boez

talking to a stranger under the porch of the building.

"Yes, I leave for Manila at once," Boez was saying. "I have an important mission on the island of Luzon."

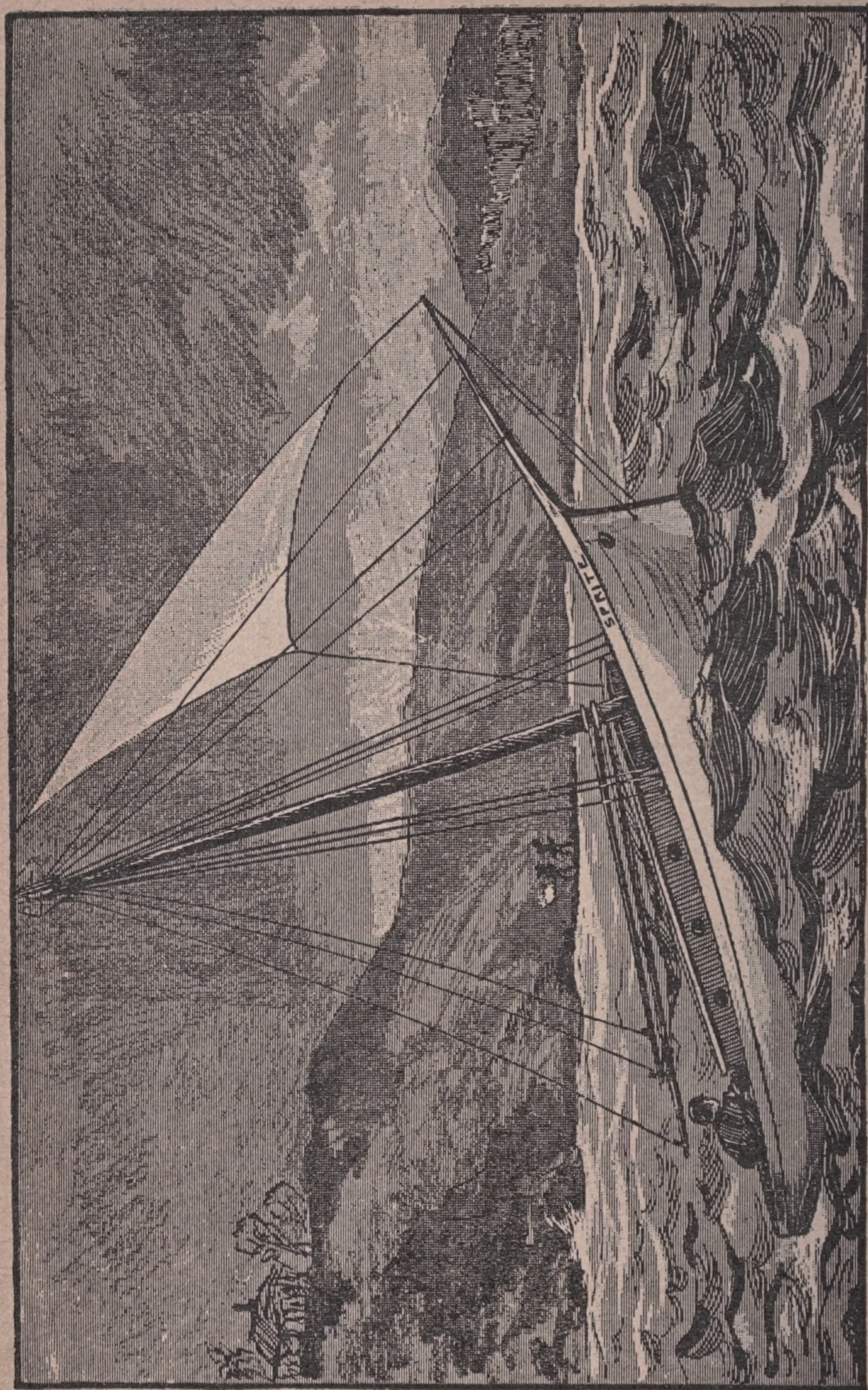
He spoke with his usual strong Spanish accent, and I was at once interested. But before I could hear more the two men walked away, and, entering a carriage standing near, drove off.

"So he is going to the island of Luzon," I mused. "I wonder if we will meet him out there?"

Returning to the *Sprite*, I placed my purchases in the locker, and ran up the sails once more. The breeze was freshening, and I soon found that I had to take a reef in the mainsail. Then it began to blow a regular gale, and I had to take in everything but the jib.

"Humph! sailing the sloop is going to be no picnic," I said to myself. "How angry the river is getting!"

The whitecaps were piling up, one over another, and soon the *Sprite* was pitching and tossing in a fashion to make an ordinary landsman sick. However, I knew my course and kept to it. But I began to wonder how I was to make the landing below the old summer-house without going to pieces on the rocks.



IT WAS A SIGNAL MEANT FOR ME.—Page 37.

Suddenly I heard a pistol shot, brought to my ears on a puff of wind. It came from where I had left my brothers. What did it mean? Had Cal Bender got away from them and was another fight going on?

I was still quarter of a mile from the summer-house landing when another pistol shot rang out. Looking toward the shore I made out two figures running down the hill path, away from the summer-house. The figures were those of Don and Oliver.

They came along until they gained the water's edge, and then I saw Don wave something white in the air. It was evidently a signal meant for me.

Without delay I ran the *Sprite* toward the point where my brothers were standing.

As I did so I heard a yelling from the side of the hill.

Mr. Narcross was coming after them!

"Hi! hi! stop!" he yelled. "Stop, boys, I command you!"

"Take us on board, Frank!" cried Oliver. "Hurry up, or it will be too late."

"I can't run in close here," I answered. "It's too shallow. Wade out a bit."

They did as I urged, and soon, as the *Sprite* glided by, both seized the sloop's side and

scrambled on board. At the same time I put up the mainsail again, the wind having gone down a little.

"Boys! boys! do you hear me?" stormed Mr. Narcross, as he reached the water's edge and stood there shaking his fist at us.

"We hear you perfectly, Mr. Narcross," answered Oliver.

"Come back, then."

"We don't intend to come back."

"What! How dare you disobey me!" stormed our guardian.

"You had no right to lock us in the wine-vault," put in Don.

"I had the right—after you had acted like a set of thieves."

"Mr. Narcross, we didn't take your pocket-book," said Oliver, as calmly as he could. "Cal Bender took that. That is why we had the fight with him."

"Calvin Bender! Impossible!"

"It is true. We found the pocketbook on him. But it contained only five dollars—which lies in the summer-house still."

"Calvin is no thief."

"Yes, he is," I put in. "He is not only a thief, but a sneak in the bargain. You ought to beware of him."

"Don't talk, Frank. Turn that boat around at once."

"Don't you do it," came from both Don and Oliver, in a low tone.

"I don't mean to," I answered.

"Mr. Narcross, we are going away," called out Oliver, for we were now some distance from where our guardian stood. "We have taken nothing belonging to you, and we do not intend to be locked up like criminals. Some day we are coming back, and then we shall expect you to make a strict accounting of all the money you have that is coming to us."

"Oliver, how you talk! Come back instantly."

"We are not coming back."

"Ha! do you mean to say you intend to run away?"

"That is the size of it. And we are going where you will not be able to find us."

"Chicago is a big city, remember," put in Don, to throw him off the track.

By this time we were too far off to continue the talk, and although Mr. Narcross continued to shout after us we could not make out what he said. Soon the darkness hid him completely from our view.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE WAY TO SAN FRANCISCO.

"WELL, we've broken loose for fair now," was Oliver's comment, as he sat down to discuss the situation. "The question is, what shall we do next?"

"Tell me what happened first," I said.

"There isn't much to tell," said Don. "You had been gone about an hour when we discovered old Narcross looking for us. We went out of the summer-house to watch him, and while we were gone Cal Bender broke loose. Oliver ordered him to stop and fired the pistol off to scare him, but it was no use. Then Mr. Narcross came after us, and followed us down to the river bank. We fired the second shot to attract your attention."

"And Bender got away?"

"Yes, and without Narcross seeing him, too," answered Oliver.

"I wonder if Mr. Narcross will suspect him, after what we said?" I ventured.

Oliver shrugged his shoulders.

"I hardly think so," he answered. "Mr. Narcross is down on us."

But for once we were mistaken. Long afterward we discovered that Mr. Narcross was honest in his purpose, and we learned, too, that he took Cal Bender to task for the robbery of the pocket-book and made it so hot for the villain that Cal was glad enough to leave the vicinity of Oceanville; and that was the last that locality ever saw of him.

"Well, if we have the brass-bound box safe I don't see why we can't run right down to San Francisco in the *Sprite*," I said, a few minutes later. "The sloop virtually belongs to us."

"By George! that's an idea!" cried Don. "Good for you, Frank!"

"Yes, but we haven't any of our clothing with us," said Oliver.

"We've got what we have on," answered Don. "How many suits do you want to wear at a time, anyway?"

There was a laugh at this, but our elder brother shook his head.

"No, I won't go entirely empty-handed," he said. "I believe we can run up to the house tonight, if we are cautious about it. Ten to one, Mr. Narcross will go off to hunt us up, and he won't think of looking for us close by."

"You have the parchment safe?" I asked, as, upon opening the box, I saw only the bag of gold coins there.

"Why, yes—here," answered Oliver, and then as he put his hand in his side pocket he turned pale. "No, I haven't it after all. I must have dropped it in the summer-house."

We all gave a groan.

"In that case the jig's up!" wailed Don.

"Up?" cried Oliver. "Nonsense. Why, I can remember everything that the parchment contained."

"But we ought to try and get it back," said I earnestly.

We talked for the best part of an hour and then came to anchor on the other side of the river to where Mr. Narcross' place was situated.

At nine o'clock it was very dark, heavy clouds covering the face of the moon and the stars. Then we moved up close to the end of Mr. Narcross' garden, and Oliver went ashore, leaving Don and I in possession of the *Sprite*.

We lay near a rocky embankment at the top of which was a small platform with an arbor.

Oliver was gone a long while,—much longer than we expected,—and during his absence Don and I talked over our future, and wondered if the

trip to far-away Luzon would result in the finding of the Diamond Treasure.

Presently a noise in the arbor above caused us to start up.

"Somebody is there!" I cried, and saw a figure hurry away.

"I think that was Alfredo Boez!" whispered Don. "But I am not sure!"

"He'll go and tell Mr. Narcross we are here!" I gasped. "Shall we push off?"

"And leave Oliver? No, Frank, that wouldn't be square."

"I don't mean to leave Oliver. We can—— Here comes Oliver now!"

I was right; and two minutes later Oliver was on board, bringing with him two valises full of clothing. He was all out of breath with running.

"Mr. Narcross is away, and I got into the house with ease," he said. "I guess I've got all the clothing we will want."

"But what kept you so long?" I asked, as we shoved off once more.

"I ran up to the summer-house, to see if I couldn't find out something about that parchment map and the letters," he said.

"And did you find anything?" asked Don.

"No. I think Cal Bender picked them up."

Again we talked the matter over, and I told

Oliver of the man who had sneaked away from the arbor.

"I don't like Boez any more than I do Bender," I said. "And I am pretty sure it was the Spaniard."

"Well, let the matter go," answered my older brother. "We'll soon be leaving all of the others behind. But I wish I had got that map," he added reflectively.

Fortunately for all of us, Oliver was a better sailor than either Don or myself, and knew the coast perfectly. He handled the *Sprite* like an old seaman, and all night long kept the sloop to her course, while Don and I slept.

By morning we were in sight of the Golden Gate, and he took a nap, leaving me to steer, with Don to assist.

That afternoon found us in San Francisco. At one of the docks we found an old sailor who lived in Oceanville, and he readily consented to deliver the sloop to Mr. Narcross and say nothing about where he had met us.

Our next move was to a banking office where we could get the old Spanish gold exchanged. After hunting around for an hour we found what we wanted, and here we received just five hundred and sixty dollars in crisp, new United States Treasury notes.

"My, but that's a small fortune to begin on!" cried Don. "No deception about that, no matter how the Diamond Treasure may pan out."

That night we slept at a modest hotel in the center of the city. We were up early, and immediately visited the shipping and were fortunate enough to run across the tramp steamer *Golden Rover*, bound for Singapore with a miscellaneous cargo.

"Yes, I shall stop at Manila, on the island of Luzon," said Captain Bartell, "but I don't know as I am looking for passengers."

We talked the matter over with him, and at last he agreed to take us for seventy-five dollars each, providing, as we knew a little about ships, that we would "lend a hand" if a storm or sickness made it necessary for him to call upon us. As a matter of fact, he was short-handed, but he did not let us know this until we were well out on the Pacific.

The start was made on the following day, and my readers can rest assured that all of us kept out of sight in the meantime, fearing that Mr. Narcross might be around to spot us. But nobody came, and we left the United States without a friend or an enemy being the wiser.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE WAY TO MANILA.

It is not my purpose in this story to tell of all that happened on that long trip from San Francisco to Manila, the capital city of the island of Luzon.

Were I to relate in detail all of our adventures, and tell of the many storms we encountered, I could readily fill a book by itself, and the story of our treasure hunt would have to wait. But this I am sure would suit no one who chances to peruse my narrative.

The storms were fearful, especially after we had passed the Sandwich Islands, and once it looked as if we must go to the bottom. In consequence of the weather our voyage lasted fully a month longer than anticipated.

But the storms were not as bad as the mutiny we had on board.

The mate started this, followed up by three of the worst sailors on the ship, and for nearly a week we had continual fighting, until the captain clapped the mate in irons.

Captain Bartell had his wife and some female relatives on board of the ship, and these women folks were afraid he would be shot down in cold blood. And we were afraid this might happen, too.

"We are with you, captain," said Oliver, when the master of the ship once came to us. "Nixon ought to be in irons."

"True, lad," said the captain. "But I am afraid Nixon will cost me much trouble when we get to Manila. He has an uncle there who owns a one-third interest in this ship."

Nixon, who was the mate, had tried to be very friendly with me, but I did not like his manner, and avoided him. Now, being locked up in one of the staterooms, he tried one day to make friends again.

"The captain is wrong, Frank," he said. "Just you help me to gain my liberty, and I will pay you well for it."

But I refused his offer, and then he began to call me names and used language which I shall not transcribe to these pages.

So the days went on until we turned the south point of the island of Formosa and stood down the western shore of the island of Luzon. Once some of the foremast hands tried to liberate the mate, but Captain Bartell caught them at it, and

one sailor was shot in the leg. After that the captain was absolute master until we tied up at the long wharf in Manila harbor.

But before we reached Manila Bay an incident happened which I shall never forget. Don was fishing one afternoon when of a sudden the steamer gave a lurch, and in a twinkling he went flying overboard into the China Sea.

"Man overboard!" sang out somebody, and a rush was made, Oliver being in the lead.

"It's Don!" he cried.

"Help! help!" came from Don. "I'm all tangled up in the fish-line!"

"I'll help you!" cried Oliver, and mounting the rail, he made a dive to Don's assistance. I had been below, and came up just in time to see him disappear beneath the waves.

It was no light task for Oliver to swim to Don's side, and before he reached him Don had gone under.

But Oliver was brave—he always had been, and I think he always will be—and he went down, too, and soon came up with Don's form in his arms.

"Can you hold him up?" I shouted.

"Yes, but bring a boat!" cried Oliver.

As quickly as it could be accomplished, a small boat was lowered, and I entered it along with sev-



HE MADE A DIVE TO DON'S ASSISTANCE.—*Page 48.*

eral sailors. Soon we were alongside of Oliver and Don, and hauled them on board.

Then we learned how near to death Don had been. The fish-line had become entangled about his throat, and it was so tight that it had almost strangled him.

"I was afraid I was a goner!" he said, after he was taken back on board and made comfortable. "I never want another such experience."

It was night when we went into Manila Bay, and it was not until the following morning that we tied up in front of the quaint old city, lying on both sides of the River Pasig.

The mate was allowed to go on shore, and he at once reported to his rich uncle that Captain Bartell had abused him. Soon after this there was a row all around, and the upshot of the matter was that Captain Bartell gave up the ship, and he and his wife and female relatives came ashore bag and baggage and put up at one of the old-fashioned Spanish hotels of which Manila boasted.

"I have some money," he said to Oliver. "I shall live here for a while and then go to Hong Kong, where I am sure I can get another vessel. I don't want to work under any such firm as that. But, boys, now you are in Manila, tell me what you intend to do?"

"We are going to seek our fortune," said Oliver.

At this the captain laughed. "All right, I hope you find it," he said. "But I don't know what three live Americans are going to do among these Spaniards, and Malays, and Tagals, and Kanas, and I don't know what all."

"Well, we are going to look around first," said Don; and there the talk dropped.

My brothers and I remained in the city of Manila nearly three weeks, during which time we became pretty well acquainted with the surroundings and also learned the direction to be taken to reach the burning mountain Kiwoku, which was located many days' journey back from the sea-coast.

One day Don, who had been taking a stroll about the government buildings in what is called Old Manila, came bursting into the hotel room full of excitement.

"Wonders will never cease!" he cried. "Who do suppose I met awhile ago?"

"Who?" I asked.

"First I met Alfredo Boez and a little later I met—can you believe me—Cal Bender!"

"Impossible!" gasped Oliver, while I stared at Don in open-mouthed amazement.

"Yes, and that isn't all," went on Don.

“Bender was talking to a native, and I heard him ask the Tagal if he had ever heard of a Kana by the name of Pando Kolo.”

“Great Cæsar! He is after our treasure!” I ejaculated. “He must have that parchment.”

CHAPTER IX.

A TRIP INTO THE INTERIOR.

My brothers instantly agreed that I must be right—that Cal Bender must have the precious document beyond a doubt.

“Now what is to be done?” asked Oliver.

“Where did Cal Bender go?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” answered Don.

“If we can find him we must get the document away from him,” said I.

But finding Bender was not so easy. We looked for him for several days. Then I ran across him in a hardware store, whither I had gone to buy a pistol previous to our setting out for the interior of the island.

A wordy war followed, and when I tried to detain Bender he struck me a blow in the face that nearly knocked me senseless. When I got up he was gone.

“Dat’s one bad man,” said the keeper of the store. “After dis you bettair keep away from heem.”

"I am not afraid of him," said I, but I determined in the future to be on my guard against Cal Bender.

In the meantime Oliver and Don ran across Alfredo Boez. Whether or not the Spaniard knew what had brought us to the islands, they did not learn, but they said Boez treated them coldly and growled out something that Mr. Narcross had cheated him in a mining deal.

"He is an enemy, as is Bender," said Oliver. "We want to beware of both of them."

"It's too bad," I said. "I am afraid we'll have trouble enough here with the natives, without having trouble with such people as Boez and Bender, too."

Careful inquiry had elicited the information that Pando Kolo lived up in the vicinity of the Laguna de Bay, and hither we determined to make our way on horseback in search of the fellow.

"If we can only hire him for a guide we'll be all right," said Don.

"Yes, unless he has us murdered when he learns that we want the Diamond Treasure," I answered.

We were soon on our way, having hired three of the best horses we could find in the sleepy old city. At first the road was fair, but soon it grew

rough and mountainous, with rocks on one side and a veritable jungle on the other.

"A good place to meet brigands," observed Oliver, as we rode along. "Boys, I am afraid that traveling to the burning mountain is going to be no picnic."

At noon we stopped at a small village for refreshments and then pushed on straight for the shore of the Laguna de Bay. We moved on steadily until sunset, but no large body of water put in an appearance.

"Here's a mess!" declared Don. "I think we've lost our way."

"It looks like it," I answered. "Oliver, what do you think about it?"

"Humph! something is wrong," grumbled my oldest brother.

As in all tropical localities, it began to grow dark rapidly, until we could see but little along the roadway, with its tangle of trees, bushes, and trailing vines.

Suddenly a wild unearthly shriek arose on the air, causing our hair to fairly stand on end. The shriek frightened even the horses, and they pranced about madly, giving us all we could do to stop them.

"What in the world can that mean?" asked Don.

"Don't ask me," I answered, with a shiver. "I never heard such a scream in my whole life before. Somebody must be getting murdered."

"Maybe it was a monkey," suggested Oliver, but his tone told that he did not mean what he said.

"A monkey!" said Don. "No, that was a human being. Whoa, there, whoa!"

For his horse would not stand still, nor would mine, and up the road we tore at a mad gallop, Oliver bringing up the rear. On and on, and still on, until a rocky barrier barred our further progress.

"Now we have lost the way completely," groaned Don. "We must go back the way we came."

"Here is another trail," I answered, peering around in the darkness.

"Yes, but who knows where it leads to?" said Oliver. "We don't want to ride into any pit-fall."

"We will advance slowly," I said. "Come on."

Anything was better than remaining there in that dark and lonely spot, and so on we went, but with great caution, remembering the awful sounds we had heard but a short while before.

Yet now it was silent, only the cries of the night

birds and the humming of the insects breaking the stillness.

"If that was murder being committed we must have a care," said Oliver. "I believe this road is taking us back to where we came from, or pretty close to it."

The horses were restless, showing that something was wrong, and we moved along at little better than a slow walk, each in the meantime keeping eyes and ears wide open for the first sign of danger from any quarter. Then it began to rain, at first lightly and soon in a perfect torrent.

Presently we came to a slight bend in the road. Here there was a pool of water, and moving around this, we espied, on our right, in a dense mass of shrubbery, a hut built of stone and thatched with a grass-like material. We brought our horses to a standstill and began to inspect the place. A dark form appeared at what looked like a doorway in the hut, and gazed toward us—as we could tell by its position.

Don advanced his horse a little ahead of ours and began to interrogate the dark figure. "Can we get shelter here?" he asked, bending forward in the saddle.

"We wish to get something to eat," I put in, for I was exceedingly hungry.

The figure motioned to us to go away. Don

renewed his efforts at conversation, and Oliver and I joined in, but the figure only motioned to us to depart. As we persisted in our efforts the motions became the more frantic, and we were very much puzzled. Finally it seemed so funny, in spite of the uncanny time and place, that we could hardly restrain ourselves from laughing.

When we did so, the man—for such it was—disappeared within the hut, presently to return accompanied by a tall, thin woman who raised her voice in frantic denunciation of us and bidding us be gone and threatening us with all manner of evil.

“What will we do now?” said Don, turning to Oliver and myself with a comical look on his face. These people seem to be afraid to entertain us,” he continued. “They must suspect that we want to injure them.”

While Don was saying this I had dismounted to tighten a buckle on my horse. As I bent down to take hold of the strap a shot rang out and my horse gave a plunge that sent me sprawling into a dense undergrowth by the roadside. My horse galloped madly away, with Don and Oliver after him to prevent his escape.

I gathered myself up as quickly as possible, and scrambled out to the road. The two people at

the hut had disappeared, and although I could hear the hoof-beats on the trail that Oliver and Don had taken my brothers were out of sight. I was alone on a strange road. The firing of the shot was somewhat disconcerting. I knew not whence it had come, nor the reason for it.

While I was deliberating what was to be done, I was suddenly seized from behind and thrown violently to the ground. I struggled to free myself and to get a look at my assailant. I soon found out that I had two persons to deal with. Being a fair wrestler, I managed to give them a good tussle, but as the odds were against me I soon felt that I could not maintain the unequal struggle.

With my whole strength exerted in a supreme effort, I pushed away one of my assailants and kicked the other under the jaw. With a howl of rage and pain this one seized a large stone in the road and hurled it at me with all his might. In an instant I saw that it was Cal Bender who had cast the stone.

I dodged, and the missile flew by in dangerous proximity to my head. Realizing my danger at the hands of Cal Bender, who I now knew was capable of any desperate villainy, I whipped out my revolver, resolved to defend myself by any means. Bender made a move to get his own

pistol, when I called on him to desist, threatening to kill him where he stood if he made another move.

The villain was blind with rage when he found that he was balked, and he let loose a torrent of vile abuse that made my blood boil with anger. His companion, a low squat fellow of disagreeable appearance, whom I afterward learned he had picked up in Manila, was disposed to quit the scene the moment I had drawn my revolver. He spoke to Bender in a low tone, and I then thought that he was urging Cal to drop the business in hand and peg out. Bender was sulky because of his situation and wanted to parley. I hoped to detain them long enough to give Don and Oliver a chance to get back. I longed to regain possession of the map which I felt sure that Bender had in his keeping. With this end in view, I began to devise some means of getting it back. Resolving on a bold course, I demanded of the rascal that he give me the document as a prerequisite to his liberty.

"Haint got no map!" he cried, shaking his head from side to side and cautiously advancing toward me.

I warned him that if he made another move like it I would put a ball into him. This brought him to terms, and he began to whine that he knew

nothing about a map—never had one, and did not know what I meant.

“Then why did you attack me a while ago?” I asked. “Why are you hunting up Pando Kolo?”

“Who says I’m looking for Pando Kolo? It’s false!” he yelled.

“Oh, no, it’s not false!” I replied steadily—“it’s the truth, and you would not have known anything of Kolo if you had not stolen the map.”

Bender fumed, and denied all knowledge of Kolo and the map; he protested that I was entirely mistaken in him—that he was only an unfortunate man with appearances against him.

The lying hypocrisy of the fellow disgusted me, and I was fast losing my patience when I heard the sound of hoof-falls on the road; Bender and his companion heard the sounds at the same time, and grew extremely anxious to get away. I threatened to shoot them if they made any movement looking toward escape.

At last Don and Oliver appeared. They had regained my horse. Great was their surprise when they beheld me with drawn pistol holding Cal Bender and his companion at bay.

“Here’s a ‘how-d’ye-do’!” cried Don. “What’s up now, Frank?”

"Well, if that isn't Bender!" exclaimed Oliver, after a long-drawn whistle.

"Gents," whined Bender, "this is all a mistake."

"No mistake about it," I interposed. "You must give up the map you stole and tell us where Kolo is before we let you go."

"Don't know anything about this Kolo nor the map," persisted Bender.

"Then we'll have to search you," said Don, getting down from his horse and fastening the animal with my own to a near-by tree. Oliver did the same with his horse.

Advancing toward the two villains, Don and Oliver soon laid hands on Cal Bender. Covering the other one with my pistol now that Cal was being attended to, I soon convinced him that it would be wise for him to offer no interference in the search of Cal Bender's person.

Don drew forth from an inner pocket of Bender's shirt a packet of papers. Searching through them, he failed to discover the map.

"It's just as I told you, boys," whined the rascal. "There's no map that I've got."

CHAPTER X.

PANDO KOLO.

DON was nonplused for a moment. Perhaps Bender was telling the truth, after all. It seemed so, but I was perfectly sure that Cal Bender was a consummate villain, and a villain is always a falsifier.

"Make him take off his shoes!" I cried. "Look them through and through."

"There's nothing there," protested Bender sulkily.

"Cut them open!" said Oliver. "We'll see if you are lying or not."

Bender struggled, but Don and Oliver soon had him down, and his shoes were taken off after a bit of a struggle.

A careful search revealed a bit of parchment concealed in the shoe. Oliver held it up triumphantly. "Here it is at last!" he cried jubilantly.

Bender fumed and raved like a pirate. His rage was wicked, and an evil look of cunning shot from his eyes that boded us ill.

"You can go now," said Don, flinging Bender's shoes toward him.

"Not yet!" I cried, in excitement. "He must tell us where we can find Pando Kolo."

"You'll never find him," said Cal Bender with a hiss of hate. "Dead men tell no tales."

I was seized with a sudden fear that Pando Kolo was dead, killed by Bender—perhaps after he had found out something from the native.

"You have killed him, then!" I cried. "His blood is on your hands! We heard his cries. We can't let you go. You must answer for this."

I had scarcely spoken when Bender struck at Don, who had reached out to seize him. Don being off his guard momentarily was thrown down. Oliver jumped for Bender, but the man eluded him and made for the undergrowth with great speed. I pointed my pistol at him and fired. By this time Don was on his feet again, and gave chase. In the *mêlée* Bender's companion darted away.

Oliver and I followed after Don. We penetrated the brush for some distance, but we could see nothing of Bender. After beating about for some time we started to return to our horses. As we came back we passed close to the thatched hut. There was a light within, and we heard voices.

Peering through a crack in the door jam, I saw

inside the hut the tall thin woman and her companion. They were engaged in an excited confab. The man was throwing his arms up and down and talking volubly. The woman, with long tangled masses of hair hanging down her back and over her face, partly concealing her features, was rocking to and fro, her eyes rolling wildly and her lips moving excitedly. Their words were in a tongue foreign to me.

"Come, come," said Don, tapping me on the shoulder; "let us get out of this." I turned to answer him when the door suddenly opened, and I was confronted by the tall, thin woman. "Go 'way, white man," she said, pushing me aside.

I saw that she was in great distress, and sudden pity for her arose in my heart, and I asked her in a kindly way if I could be of any service to her. She did not seem to understand my words fully, but I think my manner must have impressed her. For answer she motioned to me to go inside the hut.

As I was about to comply with her bidding, Oliver urged me not to go, and so did Don, who was anxious to get back to the road, for the rain was letting up. Telling them to go on, and that I would shortly follow, I went into the hut. As I entered the tall woman followed me. When we were inside we were joined by the native man. I

looked at him inquiringly. The woman said a few words to him, and he took me into a kind of recess behind a screen of bamboo. There a man lay on a low couch. By the dim light of a lamp stuck in a corner I saw by his features that he was a Tagal or a Kana.

"What is the matter with him?" I asked.
"Who is he?"

"Him Pando Kolo, and him hurt," answered the man, as he drew down an old quilt that covered the form on the couch.

"Pando Kolo!" I exclaimed, for I was truly startled to meet the man we were searching for, in this way and under such circumstances.

"Yes, this Pando Kolo, the Diamond King," said the woman, drawing closer.

"How was he hurt? Who did it?" I asked, turning from one to the other. Then Bender's words came back to me: "Dead men tell no tales."

I examined the man as well as I could, and I found a large welt on the back of his head. He had evidently been struck a tremendous blow by a bludgeon. He was still alive, though it was a great wonder that he had not died at once.

I learned that Pando Kolo was a relative of the couple that lived in the hut, and sometimes he made long stays with them.

Wishing to learn what I could, I asked why he was called the Diamond King, when they started in to tell me a long tale of how another relative had become possessed of a secret and which had been transmitted to Pando Kolo, but so far as anything definite was concerned, I learned nothing but what the parchment revealed. Kolo held the secret fast. I then thought—and it has since proven correct—that Bender had been unable to obtain the secret from the native and in his rage had attempted to kill him.

The injured man moved uneasily, and began to moan. Telling the woman to get some hot water ready, I left the hut to consult with Oliver and Don. Gaining the road, I was met by Oliver and informed that when they had come back the horses were gone. Don was down the road some distance looking for them. It suddenly flashed on me that Cal Bender and his companion had doubled on their tracks and stolen the horses. Whistling for Don soon brought him to us, and I then informed both of the presence of Kolo in the hut and that the loss of our horses would not matter very much, seeing that the object of our trip was nearly accomplished. They both agreed with me.

We walked to the hut, and there did what we could for Kolo's comfort. Hot bandages were

applied, and the tall woman brought out such simple curatives as she had in the place.

During the night we were told by the tall woman that she had discovered Pando Kolo just back of the hut in the early part of the evening. He was lying face down and unconscious.

We promised to watch over the Tagal during the night, and the native couple retired to get a little sleep.

Don, Oliver, and myself took turns in watching over Pando Kolo, and in studying the map which we had recovered.

An examination of the ancient parchment revealed the fact that nothing had been done with the copy. We were glad that Bender no longer had a guide to the treasure spot. It was unlikely that his memory would retain all the directions it contained. Yet there was the possibility of his stumbling across the cave where the diamonds were concealed.

Pando Kolo moved uneasily in his stupor, and words escaped from his lips that greatly excited me. I was near the couch, and Don and Oliver were engaged in a soft-spoken conversation a little way off. I raised my hand warningly to my comrades, and bent my head down low over Kolo so that not a word he might say should escape me.

"Diamond King!" he said, breathing heavily, "me Diamond King. Rich now. No work any more. Bili jealous; try to burn me, but I must have them. Not afraid any more." Then followed what sounded like a lot of gibberish to me, but I think now that it must have been the native tongue. Through it all there ran a superstitious fear of Bili, the Fire-King of the natives.

For some time Kolo lay silent, not a sound escaping his lips. He tossed about, and we waited anxiously for him to speak. There was perfect silence in the whole hut, when the cry of a bird in the forest aroused the man again. He started up and tried to rouse himself, but he fell back exhausted with the effort.

"The sun rises!" he murmured, placing his hands to his face. "Four hours' journey and I shall be the Diamond King."

"Let me take a hand in this, Frank," whispered Oliver, coming closer to the couch.

"What do you mean?" I asked my brother with considerable curiosity.

"You will see," he answered, bending close to Kolo. Then he began to speak in a low, soft, musical tone.

"Wouldst thou have the diamonds, oh, Pando Kolo?"

"What's that!" cried Kolo in excitement.

"Whose voice do I hear?" and he tossed uneasily on the couch.

"'Tis I, Bili, the Fire-King. I am come to help you."

"Will you give me the diamonds?"

"Thou mayest take them. And art thou sure of the way? Will thy feet not mislead thee? The journey is rough, the dangers are many, the face of the country has changed, and thou mayest be lost amidst the burning rocks that line my habitation. Recite and tell me thy knowledge so that I may know if thou hast forgotten."

Don and I looked at Oliver ready to laugh, but we were so anxious to hear Kolo's answer that we restrained ourselves.

"I will tell you, oh, Bili," replied Kolo, his eyes opening dreamily; whereat we dropped from sight. Of course in his dazed condition he might not have noticed us; but as we did not want to take any chances of his discovering the ruse, we kept out of sight and made the light in the room, which was already quite dim, still dimmer.

Pando Kolo then gave a long, detailed description of the route to be taken to the cave of the burning mountain where the diamonds lay hidden. This cleared up several points in the ancient document and the map that had puzzled us somewhat. Oliver prompted Kolo whenever his

memory lagged, still personating the Fire-King Bili.

"It is well. Thou hast told truthfully, but if thou wouldest prosper, Bili tells thee that by working thou shalt gain a competence. The diamonds are thine if thou wilt have them; Bili will aid thee; but it were well to give up the idea; danger may come when thou dost possess them."

Pando Kolo groaned and turned over on his couch.

I must confess I felt somewhat dubious about the propriety of the ruse that had been resorted to; still, I think, it had been done in a species of fun and quaintness, and further we had as much right, if not more, to the diamonds as anyone.

While we were talking amongst ourselves, and congratulating each other on the probably successful outcome of our trip in search of the treasure Kolo arose from the couch with a wild yell that nearly froze the blood in my veins. He ran about in a crazy manner, striking out right and left, and to avoid the blows he was probably aiming at imaginary enemies, we fled from the hut precipitately.

CHAPTER XI.

ABDUCTION OF OLIVER.

WHEN we were outside we breathed freer. Halting by the roadside, we held a consultation.

"We must get back to Manila, somehow," said Oliver. "I'm tired of this locality already."

We agreed with him; and, after looking about us, we thought it best to ask the natives at the hut what was the best way to get back.

Don at once started off toward the hut. I followed after him slowly, while Oliver remained on the road. I heard Don talking to the woman, and she was trying to tell him as well as she could, but as our brother seemed to find it difficult to understand what she was saying, I drew closer with the idea that I might be of use.

I had hardly reached Don when I heard Oliver calling for us. His voice was high-pitched, and I felt that there was something wrong.

Don and I hastened as fast as we could to where Oliver had been. When we got there Oliver was nowhere to be seen. There were evidences of a struggle in the road. The dirt was

kicked about, and there were tracks of feet criss-crossed and mixed up.

Once we heard a faint cry, and immediately started off in its direction. The trail led away from the main road, through a growth of underbrush. This we followed until we came to a small rocky stream.

On the banks of this stream grew a lot of tangled bushes. Some of them were broken, and bits of clothing hung to them. We were then sure that we were on the right track.

We crossed the stream by jumping from stone to stone, and as it was not very wide we got over with but little trouble. It was now quite light, as day was breaking, and there was a strong chance that we might get a glimpse of Oliver and his abductors—for we felt that he must have been carried off.

Once over the stream, and there was a broad even field to cross. Beyond was a dense growth of forest, consisting of palms and great tree-ferns.

Rapidly crossing the field, we soon plunged into the forest. Here the dense undergrowth of tropical vegetation, and the overhanging festoons of vines and creepers, impeded our progress.

“Look! look!” cried Don, pointing toward the interior of the forest. I gave vent to my sur-

prise as I gazed in the direction, for there I saw Bender. The rascal was distant from us about a hundred and fifty yards. We just caught a glimpse of him through an opening in the forest when he disappeared in the dense vegetation.

Redoubling our efforts to get through the masses of vines and brush, so as to gain on Bender, we soon found all further progress in his direction impeded by a wide boggy place. Skirting the edge of the swamp, we had to make a considerable *détour*, and by this we lost much valuable time. When we emerged into the open again Bender was not to be seen.

As luck would have it, we came across a good-natured young native who was gathering herbs for medicines. He stopped in his work when we began to question him, and answered our inquiries readily and intelligently. His English was fair.

He told us that there were three men in the party. One was young, and the others were older. He had spoken to them, for the younger one was struggling to free himself, and he had been informed by the thin man that the younger man was a deserter from a ship, and that he was then a prisoner. When we asked him to show the direction in which the party had gone, he immediately volunteered to go with us.

We started on a run led by the native, whose name we soon learned was Pakelo. Under his guidance we soon gained a fairly well trodden path. Once we espied the three as they went down a slight hill that ended at the edge of a brook. We could plainly see Oliver struggling to free himself. As we went along Pakelo suddenly stopped, stooped down, and picked up a yellow piece of parchment. It was the map that we had taken from Bender some time before.

"How did this get here?" said Don, wrinkling his brows in a puzzled way. "Oliver must have lost it!"

"Lost it!" I cried. "Not at all—he has thrown it away on purpose; he did not want Bender to get it back again; he took the chance of our picking it up."

"I think you are right," replied Don, as we again took up the pursuit.

I placed the parchment in my pocket, determined that no one should get it without a desperate resistance on my part.

Pakelo now turned sharply to the right. When we asked him why he replied that the road which the party had taken led to a deep morass, and that by going the way we were we should meet them, for they would have to turn back, and instead of taking the road that would—as they

must think—bring them back to us, if we had continued to follow them—they would take this road, and so we should probably meet face to face.

His honesty of purpose was evident in his face, and his native shrewdness impressed us favorably. We continued to jog along easily, as Pakelo said there was no need for hurry—we must surely meet them.

“If that’s the case,” said Don, coming to a halt, “we might as well wait here until the game comes up. It’s just like a rabbit shoot; you sit on a stump and the game circles round.”

“A little further on there is a good hiding-place,” said Pakelo.

On we went, and soon we were ensconced behind a mass of foliage that hid us well from view, while we could plainly see a long distance down the trail.

We waited somewhat impatiently, until finally Pakelo offered to go down the road and reconnoiter. This being safe, for Pakelo would be unsuspected of being in our service, he was urged to go.

After a little wait Pakelo came back and told us that the three were approaching. Don was bent on rushing out at them at once, but when I suggested to him that we wait until they came

opposite to our hiding-place he fell in at once with my idea.

Peering cautiously through the tangled mass of vines and foliage that surrounded us, we saw Oliver coming along between Bender and his villainous companion. Don began to boil with rage and indignation, and I had hard work to restrain him from breaking from cover. I will own that I felt just as bad as did my brother, but it seemed to me we could gain an advantage by holding back a little.

As they came closer we saw that Oliver's face was streaked with blood, and he seemed to be completely worn out, probably from his struggles. Bender's clothes were torn and he was breathing with spasmodic effort. Chance made them come to a halt directly opposite our covert.

"What are you going to do with me?" cried Oliver.

"You'll see in a minute, young fellow," answered Bender, as he let go of Oliver's arm and walked away a few paces.

We wondered what the rascal was up to. There was a bad, determined look on his face that was very forbidding.

"Now, see here, my hearty," he began, seating himself on a rock by the side of the trail. "You say you haint got the map. Well I'm going to

give you just five minutes to produce it, or to draw one just like it. If you don't, I'll serve you as I did Pando Kolo."

Pakelo pricked up his ears when he heard the name of Kolo. He became intensely interested.

"I have not got the map, nor can I draw one from memory," replied Oliver.

"I won't stand any tomfoolery," returned Bender, moving uneasily. "There's no time to be lost. Your life is in your own hands. Give me the map and I'll let you go."

"You have searched me, and you know I have no map."

"Then draw one."

"I can't."

Bender got up and came close to Oliver. There was a big club in his hand which he had picked up from the roadside. Oliver struggled to break his captor's hold. He aimed a terrific blow at the man's head. The fellow dodged, and Oliver tumbled to the ground, carried there by the force of his onslaught on the man.

We broke from cover with a yell like Comanche Indians. We hurled ourselves on Bender and his companion. Blows flew right and left. Oliver, seeing us, was almost overcome with joy. It lent strength to his arm, and he felled Bender to the ground with a smashing blow between the

eyes. The rascal's companion tried to escape, but Don held him in a vise-like grip.

The battle was over in short order. It took some time to bring Cal Bender to his senses, for he was considerably hurt in the *mêlée*. We bound the prisoners' hands with strong vines that Pakelo cut in the forest. When the question came up as to what was to be done with Bender and his fellow, Pakelo said that if we would help him to take the men to the village where he lived, and which was but little more than a mile away, he would see that they were brought to their just deserts.

Not knowing what such native justice might mean, and not being willing to turn the men over to what might be very savage justice, we inquired of Pakelo what would be done to them. Pakelo laughed a little and begged to remind us that all the people in that land were not savages. His sly humor at the expense of Bender and his companion amused us not a little. We were informed that they would be turned over to a Spanish justice in a near-by village to answer for an assault on Pando Kolo. We then learned that Pakelo had heard of the assault early in the morning.

Satisfied with his explanation, we told him to lead the way, and we would see that the prisoners

were safely housed where they could do no further mischief.

After a short journey we arrived at the village where Pakelo lived. All the denizens of the place turned out to watch us as we passed by, and Pakelo was kept busy explaining to everyone the meaning of our strange party.

Bender and his fellow-villain were committed to await examination. Their jail was a strongly built stone cage with heavy iron bars. We left them there with no regrets. Bender shook his hand at us, vowing to get square some time.

CHAPTER XII.

A NATIVE BIRTHDAY PARTY.

PROCURING horses at the village, after a vain attempt to learn what had become of the ones that were stolen by Bender, we set out for the return to Manila. Pakelo had given us specific directions, and we felt confident of finding the way.

We were all quite jubilant at the outcome, and the pleasant prospect of very soon locating the treasure cave at Kiwoku. We rehearsed Pando Kolo's description of the route to be taken to the cave, and, comparing our personal remembrance of what he had said, we soon came to a distinct understanding of the exact location.

Suddenly Don let out a whoop of wild exultation and sped down the trail at breakneck speed. Oliver and I followed. The animals we rode were most excellent beasts, and their sure-footedness quite surprised us.

Along the road we sped, laughing and shouting in high spirits. The air was exhilarating; and, our minds being free from present care, we

gave rein to our animals and abandoned ourselves to the enjoyment of the beautiful tropical scene.

Don, who was still in the lead, reined in his horse with a loud "Whoa!" Oliver and I at once followed suit. Just ahead was a frail bridge across a dry and deep gully. Beyond it the road turned to the left with a quick bend. As we were crossing the bridge in single file we heard sounds, beyond the bend, in the forest.

Standing up in our stirrups, so as to get a better view, we espied a native house in close proximity to the road. Coming closer we saw a number of people gathered there, and they appeared to be in the best of humor, laughing and talking in gay animation.

Halting our horses so that we might see what was going on, we were observed by the picnickers, who were celebrating the birthday of one of their number. They beckoned to us to come over.

"What can they want of us?" I observed to Don, who was nearest to me.

"I don't know, I'm sure," he replied, as he urged his horse toward the gathering, "but I'm going to find out."

Oliver and I followed Don's lead, and we were soon in the midst of the merrymakers.

I inspected the native house, and found that it was ingeniously put together. Bamboo consti-

tuted the framework of the structure, and I found that it was bound together with strong rope, made of palm-fiber. The roof was thatched with grass, and the sides were covered with the same material. The corners were braided in with ferns. These ferns turn quite dark and make a striking contrast to the light color of the grasses forming the roof and sides.

The interior of this grass house presented an attractive appearance to me. Weapons and tools hung on the walls. Big calabashes of highly polished wood were there. The nets and mats, strongly woven of grass and palm-fiber, showed much skill in their manufacture. The handles of some of the weapons were inlaid with bone and shell. The most striking thing in the house, which consisted of but one room divided by screens, was an enormous bed consisting of a heap of soft mats covered by little pillows of woven palm-leaves.

In the rear of the grass house, but attached to it, was an extension. This extension was only as high as where the peak began on the main part. It had a thatched roof, but the sides were open excepting about three feet from the ground. This space was covered with braided grasses and presented a pretty appearance.

We found the people here, who seemed to be of

the better class of Tagals, exceedingly kind and gracious. They were gentle, but still full of fun. I learned that they are exceedingly fond of a joke and a good time.

While here I had an interesting conversation with one of the men. He told me legends of the ancient Filipinos that proved to me they were men of vivid imagination, and yet of a practical turn of mind.

The women and children at the picnic were all decorated with garlands of flowers, and in some cases of the ends of peacock feathers and delicately tinted shells. There was a large mat spread out beside the grass house, and on this were squatted a number of females. We soon learned that this was a special birthday celebration and that they were going to have a feast.

What struck me as being very beautiful, yet somewhat mournful, was the singing by a number of the native men in chorus. Once they sang a song that began sweet and low, and as it proceeded it rose louder and louder until it ended in a shout that sounded like a battle-cry.

In some respects this feast put me in mind of a clam-bake that I once attended at home. but here the surroundings were entirely different and much more poetic.

As we were not in any particular hurry to get

back to Manila, we tarried for some time with the picnic party, and I must say that when we did leave them it was with considerable reluctance.

A party of young women decorated us with flowers, just before we mounted our horses, and many were the "good lucks" that sounded after us as we cantered away.

The ears of that picnic party must have burned frightfully after we left, for many were the praises that we sounded for them.

"I never knew a finer-natured people in all my life!" cried Don.

"They are just all right," sung out Oliver, patting his horse, which was dancing along the trail in a merry humor.

As for myself I could not say too much in their favor if I tried.

Talking in this strain, and looking at the gorgeous beauty of the tropical vegetation all around us, the time passed quickly.

Night overtook us before we reached even the vicinity of the Laguna de Bay, and as the path was unknown to us we had to proceed more cautiously. The way grew quite dark, and we began to fear that we had missed the proper trail.

There was not a habitation in sight, but at last we came upon a clear space. There were but few trees about, only the dense undergrowth.

Above, the sky was beautifully clear and studded with myriads of stars. Across the clearing we saw a line of low buildings stretched out against the black denseness of the forest beyond.

We made our way toward these buildings and soon arrived at a pleasant-looking dooryard in front of a small and neatly built house. Swinging under the trees in the yard was a fanciful hammock and in it was a man apparently asleep.

Halting our horses at the paling that separated the yard from the road we saw the man move uneasily.

"Good-evening, sir," shouted Don, raising himself from the saddle.

The man rubbed his eyes sleepily, and raising his head peeped at us above the edge of the hammock.

Don asked the man if he would kindly tell us how far we were from Manila. Slowly getting out of the hammock, the man approached us. When he came up to us he placed his hands on the paling and stared hard at us.

We began to think that the man was intoxicated, but in this we were mistaken—he was simply not yet fully awake.

"Why, yes; certainly I can tell you," he began after a preparatory hem or two.

"How far is it?" queried Oliver.

"About four miles and a half."

Well, my heart gave a little leap of joy at this, for I was tired out and anxious to get to bed.

"What's the road that we take?" inquired Don.

"Straight ahead—that way," returned the man, waving his hand in the direction we should go; "but," he continued, "if you have no objection I can offer you entertainment right here. You can stay for the balance of the night or longer, just as you wish."

We consulted amongst ourselves, and as the place looked inviting and there was a chance that the hotel at Manila would be closed should we go there, we decided to accept the offer.

Dismounting, we were told to take our horses to the rear, where an attendant would care for them. A shrill whistle by the man brought a native youth on the run, who took charge of our animals. We entered the house, where, before we left, we met with a curious adventure.

CHAPTER XIII.

A STRANGE ADVENTURE.

WE were seated in the dining room of the house, partaking of some refreshment which had been placed before us. Our host sat in a large easy chair, and was entertaining us with an account of how he had come to live on the island.

He was an American from Chicago, and rattled away at a great rate. His talk was interesting, but, as I was tired, I found myself wishing that he would stop and show us to our room.

"Great Scott!" I cried out, so suddenly that both Don and Oliver leaped from their chairs, while our host stared at me in blank amazement.

"What's up?" snapped Don.

"Are you ill?" inquired Oliver, coming to my side.

"Indeed I'm not," I replied, running to a door near a window that opened on a veranda.

The door was locked, but the key was in it, and I quickly turned it. Flinging open the door, I rushed out into the night.

Don, Oliver, and our host quickly followed me, asking what was the matter.

"Cal Bender!" I gasped.

"Cal Bender!" said Don in a puzzled way. "what do you mean?"

"I just saw him."

"You must be dreaming, Frank."

"Indeed I'm not," I answered indignantly; "he was peering through the window at us."

Don gave a low, long whistle of surprise.

"Sure you are not mistaken, Frank?" inquired Oliver.

"Perfectly," I answered.

We explained the situation, partly, to our host, and he at once ordered out a half-dozen of his men to search the place thoroughly.

The search proved futile, and we retired to the house. Then, after discussing the matter for a while, we were shown to our room. In it were two beds—one double and the other single. I lay down alone and my brothers occupied the double bed.

Although I was thoroughly tired, yet I could not sleep. My mind was busy with all our recent adventures. Once I got up and walked around the room. Don and Oliver were sleeping soundly. Again I lay down and tried to get a sleep, but my efforts were useless. I heard a

clock in a neighboring room sound the hour of two.

I began to wonder how Bender had escaped from the jail at the little village, when I heard a sound at the window that caused me to look toward it. At first I thought it might be the wind that stirred the lattice. I strained my ears to hear better.

Someone was trying to get into the room, I felt certain. At first I thought of calling out, but as I wished to see who it might be—perhaps Bender—I lay perfectly still. The window was up, but the blinds were closed with some kind of a fastening. This fastening the would-be intruder was trying to force.

Oliver moved uneasily in his sleep, and the bed creaked so much that I was afraid that the person at the blind might hear the sound and leave. Now, I do not pretend to extraordinary bravery, but in this case I believed that the attempt to get into our room had something to do with Cal Bender, and I did not want the quarry to take alarm.

All at once the blinds flew open, and there was a crashing sound at the window. I sprang from my bed, revolver in hand. My brothers were instantly wide awake, inquiring what the trouble was. I hastened to the window and looked out. On the ground lay a broken ladder and close to

the house was a clump of bushes torn and broken down, probably caused by the fall.

As I turned away from the window Don came up, and also Oliver. They plied me with queries as to the meaning of it all. Of course I was as much in the dark as they were.

"Let's go down and search," I cried, starting for the door.

"There is someone hurt," ejaculated Don, bending out of the window and looking down. "I heard a groan just now."

As I opened the door I was met by our host. He was very voluble in his inquiries. He had heard the noise, and wanted to know if we had been robbed, if we were hurt. He vowed vengeance on the disturber of his household, and he was in a state of great excitement.

Down the stairs he went, yelling for this one and shouting for that one. The whole house was soon in an uproar.

Don, Oliver, and I followed him, two steps at a time. We burst out of the house and ran around to where the ladder lay.

On the ground we discovered a young man with a broken leg. He begged us not to hurt him. We took hold of him, and he screamed with pain. Our host came upon the scene with a number of his men. He recognized the young

fellow as a hanger-on about the place, and who was somewhat simple-minded.

"So you've turned burglar, have you, you good-for-nothing whelp?" cried our host, looking at the fellow savagely.

"No, boss, I didn't."

"What were you trying to do, then, climbing up a ladder placed at the window?"

The fellow gave a groan of pain.

I suggested that he be taken in the house and his hurt attended to.

"Take him to the barn, that's good enough for the likes of him, the scoundrel," said our host, turning to his men.

To the barn the fellow was carried, groaning with pain. There he was placed on a pile of horse-blankets spread out on a heap of hay. One of the men, who seemed to understand something of surgery, made an examination and pronounced it a simple fracture; then one of the hands was dispatched for a doctor who lived but a short distance away.

When most of the people were gone, leaving only Don, Oliver, myself, and our host, besides a young fellow who was to attend the injured one, we learned, after much questioning, that the simple-minded youth had been acting as the agent of others. From his description, we were certain

that they were no other than Bender and his pal.

It seems that they had persuaded Peter, which was the name of the fellow, to attempt to get into our room and see if he could find a certain paper that was in our possession—this, of course was the map.

Peter had been convinced by them, through argument and the promise of tobacco, of which, our host said he was very fond, that we had stolen this paper from them, and that it was no more than just that they should get the paper back.

Don questioned Peter closely, and we found out that he was to meet them that morning at an appointed place. This rendezvous was in a small patch of woods that skirted the road about a half-mile from the house.

“There will be someone there to meet them,” said Don grimly, turning to us.

“Yes, indeed!” cried Oliver, slapping his knee.

Our host described the place more particularly to us and told us that he would go with us, fetching along a couple of his men. “I’ll send the men on ahead,” he said. “They won’t be suspected, and we will get there in a roundabout way.”

We thought no more of going back to bed, but we went into the house and ate a hasty breakfast. With this finished we started off on our quest.

From the rear of the house we took a path that led us through a grove. Then we emerged into a short strip of meadow which ended abruptly in a deep ravine, its sides covered with bushes and other vegetation. At the bottom of the ravine, which appeared to be a dried-up watercourse, the walking was pretty fair, and we had little difficulty in making good progress.

Our host informed us that the rendezvous was but a quarter of a mile away from where we were. We walked along cautiously, keeping a sharp lookout for Bender. It wanted then but fifteen minutes to the time set for the meeting.

Just ahead was a place where the high banks of the ravine ended on a level with the bottom, forming a small cross-valley. In this cross-valley was a clump of trees, and as we went along I saw a face peering out at us from behind one of the trees. It was the face of Cal Bender, and he quickly dodged back, but not too quick for me to get a good look and be sure of my man.

"There he is!" I cried in excitement, and pointing with my finger in the direction of the trees. Don looked and ran that way, his pistol in his hand.

We all pressed on toward the clump of trees. Bender and his chum fairly flew from their concealment, and ran away with great speed.

"Stop!" yelled Don at the top of his voice, "or I'll fire!"

"Fire and be blowed!" returned Cal Bender, increasing his speed.

"Fire your pistol, it will put my men on guard!" cried our host.

The idea being a good one, the three of us blazed away. The noise we made sounded like a miniature battle.

On we went in the chase. Over sticks, and through tangled masses of vines and creepers, we pushed our way. Bender and his chum led us a lively race.

For a moment we lost sight of them as they disappeared in a gully. Then they reappeared, as they tore up the opposite bank.

"I feel like firing at them, Frank," said Don to me, his face aglow with excitement.

"No, no, don't do that, Don!" I cried in alarm, for just then my brother looked as though he meant it.

Bender and his companion kept up the pace, and when we had crossed the gully they were nowhere to be seen.

We threshed around in the undergrowth for a little while, thinking they were concealed, but we failed to discover them.

Then we leaped a fence and soon emerged on a path that ran along the edge of the woods. A short distance away we saw a sight that caused us to hurry on at top speed.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FRESH START.

THERE was a scrimmage on the trail. A half-dozen men were whirling around in a confused mass. There were shouts and cries, and dust was flying in the air.

When we came close to the party, Bender and his pal were in the charge of our host's men. But strangest of all, there were Pakelo and Pando Kolo!

How they had gotten there just in the nick of time, for we learned that Bender and his fellow had made desperate resistance, was explained by Pakelo.

When it was discovered that the two had broken out of jail at the village, Pakelo had immediately started in pursuit, and on the way he had fallen in with Kolo, who, though still somewhat dazed from the blow he had received at the hands of Bender, when he found that Pakelo was in search of the man at once determined to go with him and wreak vengeance on the scoundrel who had tried to kill him.

Bender and his pal were marched to the barn of our host. There they were securely bound and, after identification by Peter, the simpleton, placed in a conveyance and hurried off to jail. As they were being driven away Bender scowled at us blackly. This affected us but little, for we felt sure, now, there would be no escape for him. Pando Kolo went off with Pakelo, for we had come to the conclusion that we should not need his services in locating the treasure cave; and, as he did not recognize us, we did not enlighten him as to our identity nor our purpose.

In a little while we were on the road to Manila once more, with our hearts lighter than they had been for several hours.

Oliver and Don rode in advance and set off on such a gallop that soon they passed out of sight around a bend in the road.

This had scarcely happened when my horse began to walk in a lame fashion. Thinking he might have something in his hoof I dismounted and examined the member, and discovered that he had picked up a thin, sharp stone, which was evidently very painful to him.

I could not pull out the stone with my fingers, and so had to use my knife.

In using the blade I made a slip and as the stone came out, the horse shied, threw me on my

back and made off at top speed down a side trail.

"Whoa!" I yelled. "Whoa!" And as he did not stop, I set off after him on foot. I yelled to my brothers, but I was doubtful if they would hear me.

On went the horse up a rocky trail and along a fringe of tropical bushes. At last he began to slow up, and I made an extra dash for him. I had just gained his side when something happened that horrified me beyond measure.

The trail led to an old-fashioned Tagal well—a circular, stony basin at least twelve feet across and twelve to fifteen feet deep. Down plunged my steed into this opening and I after him. The horse landed in a heap at the bottom and I came down on top of him.

Fortunately I was not hurt, having the horse for a cushion. As soon as I could I scrambled to my feet, and then the horse got up, little the worse for the fall.

I found the well perfectly dry, excepting in one corner, where the recent rain had formed a small pool. Here there was a crack through which the water slowly trickled away into the earth.

How to get out of the hole was a serious question. I could not reach the top of the well even by standing on my horse's back, nor could I leap



CLINGING TO THE DAMP STONES WAS NO EASY MATTER.—Page 99.

up. I tried this once, and came near to breaking my neck in the attempt. Then I yelled as loudly as I could, but no one came to my assistance.

At last I flung off my boots and my coat and tried to climb the wall. This was a ticklish job, for clinging to the damp stones was no easy matter. But I persevered, and at last drew myself to the upper ground. I was so exhausted that for several minutes I had to lie still, trying to get back my breath.

"Frank! Frank! where are you?" came in Don's voice.

"Here I am!" I gasped, and the next moment my brothers were at my side.

I explained what had taken place, and after I felt better we set about rescuing my horse and getting back my coat, hat, and boots.

At first it looked as if we would not be able to do much for the animal, but presently several natives hove into appearance, and for a small reward they procured strong ropes and some plank-ing, and soon my steed was restored to me.

Nightfall found us back at Manila and so fagged out that we could scarcely stand when we dismounted. Nevertheless, we procured supper before retiring. We slept "like tops," as Don said, and it was not until noon of the next day that any of us thought of arising.

"I wonder what Mr. Narcross thinks about us?" said Oliver, while we were dressing.

"Perhaps he thinks we are dead," I answered.

"I don't care what he thinks," put in Don, "so long as he leaves us alone."

We were soon outside, and made our way by stage to where the inhabitants of Manila have something of a bathing resort.

"Let's have a bath!" cried Don; and, all being willing, we were soon sporting in the limpid waters of Manila Bay, along with many other natives and foreigners.

"If I'm not mistaken," said Oliver, after blowing the water out of his mouth, for a large wave had nearly swamped him—he had been gazing at the beach so intently for a minute or so—"there is Pando Kolo."

I looked in the direction Oliver pointed out, and there sure enough was the fellow.

Don came near us, and we called his attention to the fact.

"Wonder what he wants?" said he.

"Don't know, but I think he's up to something," I replied. "See, he's watching everybody."

"Maybe he's onto us," put in Oliver.

"What do you mean?" I asked as a suspicion began to form in my mind as to Kolo's intention.

"Let's go ashore," returned Oliver for answer.

Dripping with brine we walked up the beach to our bath-house. Pando Kolo was skulking in the neighborhood, and when we came out he followed us along a walk that led to a small open summer-house.

We sent an order for refreshments and took our places at a round-table in the building. We had hardly seated ourselves when Kolo stepped in.

We looked at the fellow in an inquiring way, and he saluted us with a wave of his hand and there was a faint familiar grin on his face.

"You know me, boss?" he began, addressing himself to Don.

"Yes, you took the two men to jail," said Don.

"Yes," answered the Tagal. "Others ought to be there, too."

"What do you mean?"

Kolo hesitated. He looked around, and was at a loss how to begin. He moved uneasily from one foot to the other. Then he began.

"You know I'm Diamond King?"

"No! are you?" answered Don in an off-hand way. "Why, I'm glad to meet you. Sit down and have some refreshment with us," at the same time pushing out a chair for him.

Tagals are always responsive to hospitality,

and this action on the part of Don softened Kolo wonderfully.

"Tell us all about it, my friend," said my brother, cocking up his legs on another chair.

"Well, you see, it's this way," began Pando Kolo. "I know where there is a place that holds a big fortune." There was a cunning look in his eyes as he stopped in expectancy.

"Well, that's a nice thing to know," put in Oliver.

"Yes, very nice," laughed Kolo.

"Is it far from here?" I inquired.

"Yes, far. Over the water."

"On some other island?" said Don, looking squarely at the Kana or Tagal.

Kolo remained silent, but his eyes were eloquent.

"Why don't you get it?" I questioned.

"That's a long story."

"Haven't you got the money to get there?"

"I get there all right."

"Won't you let us in on the ground floor?" began Don, as he winked at me.

"Mebbe you know all about it already."

"How should we know?"

"Prisoner man say so."

"The prisoner says so!"

"Yes, say you have map."

"We've got a map?"

"So he say."

"How did he know?"

"He say you stole map from him."

The refreshments came in just then, and we all fell to, including Kolo.

"Now, see here, Kolo," began Don, pointing his finger at the native, "how much do you want for this secret that you claim to possess? Name your terms."

"You want to buy me off?"

"Oh, no!" replied Don very calmly, and smiling all the time.

"Then what you want to do?"

"Name your price for telling us the secret."

"You very foolish to buy secret from me when you know it already," said Kolo with a knowing look.

"You have nothing but the word of the prisoner for that."

"Oh, yes, more too!"

"How so?"

"Peter, who broke his leg tryin' to git it." There was a triumphant gleam in his eyes when he said this. "He tell me what tall man want to get, and tall man tell me something. He want to get map. Kolo want to get map too."

"What for? You must know where the place

is that you are talking about. What do you want of a map?"

Kolo was silent, and soon showed signs of anger. Then he got up to leave. Turning to us he raised his finger warningly, and said: "Better not go there."

"Go where?"

"You know. Better not go. Get killed sure."

"Sit down, Kolo. Maybe we can make some arrangement with you. Do you know that there is a treasure hidden somewhere on these islands? If you do, what do you want to take us in?"

"I want you to keep away. You will surely get killed if you try to discover the secret."

"Why?"

"Very bad place, and besides the treasure belong to me, Pando Kolo, the Diamond King." He raised himself to his full height, and threw out his chest with every appearance of pride.

"How did you find it out? but pshaw! you are only fooling us," and Don put on a look of disgust.

"No fooling—it's true. A relative told me."

"Then why didn't you get it before?"

"There are many dangers. I tell you again, you will get killed."

"Well, you will insist that we know all about

it, and yet when we ask you to take us into your secret for a consideration you refuse."

Pando Kolo was silent. He seemed to have something on his mind that he wanted to tell, but was either ashamed or afraid to do so.

I thought at the time that it was probably some superstitious notion that made him hang back, and so I made a bold push to clear up the matter.

"Are you afraid of Bili, the Fire-King?" I said.

Pando Kolo appeared startled, and looked about him. A short podgy Kana came by just then, and Kolo's face turned ashy-white when he beheld him. Without another word he fled from the summer-house.

We looked after him in amazement, and Don gave a low, long whistle.

"I wonder who that man was?" I said to Oliver, who had stepped outside.

"Funny-looking fellow, anyway," replied my eldest brother.

Just then a gentleman passed us, and I inquired of him if he could tell me who the short, podgy man was.

"He is a Kahu," was the answer.

"What's a Kahu?"

"A priest of the ancient religion of the Kana."

"Heathen, eh?"

"Yes."

In the course of my conversation with this gentleman I learned many interesting things about the ancient people of the Philippine Islands.

It seems that while the educated people are Christians, yet amongst the lower classes there is still a certain amount of superstitious fear of the old gods kept alive by the heathen priests.

Pando Kolo was probably under this man's thumb, and, thinking it would be a good scheme to make his acquaintance, I made it a point to keep him in sight while I informed Don and Oliver of my project.

"Go ahead, Frank," said Don. "Your idea is a good one. We'll saunter around here while you make the old fellow's acquaintance."

Leaving my two brothers I walked slowly after the Kahu. He halted a short distance from me and stood still, apparently engaged in thought.

Going up to him, I bowed. He looked up and returned my salutation.

"Pardon me," I began, "but I should like to ask you a few questions, and perhaps you can do me a service for which I shall reward you well."

The Kahu looked at me for fully a minute before he deigned to answer me. His eyes seemed to search me through and through, and I must

confess I felt uncomfortable; but as I had an object in view, I did not flinch.

"Come with me," he said at last, walking away.

I went with him, and we passed along the street until we come to a story-and-a-half house. Here we went in.

CHAPTER XV.

WITH THE KAHU.

THE Kahu invited me to take a seat and begged me to excuse him for a few minutes. He then disappeared in the rear of the house, leaving me in a room which faced the street.

Looking out on the street, I saw Pando Kolo pass by and look over at the house.

"Well," I thought, "what is Kolo up to now?"

A little way beyond the house the so-called Diamond King paused and looked around, then he crossed the street diagonally and was thus out of my view.

In a little while the Kahu came into the doorway of the room where I was, and asked me to come into the next room, remarking that it was much pleasanter in there.

I arose, went in, and we were soon seated on either side of a long extension table.

"Now," said he, "please state what you wish of me."

"Do you know a fellow named Pando Kolo?" I began.

"Yes," was the reply in an easy tone.

"Is he demented?"

"Why do you ask?"

"I am informed that he imagines himself to be what he calls the Diamond King. Do you know anything about that?"

"He has such a notion, and if what he says is true I believe he can well imagine he is a Diamond King."

"Have you any influence with him?"

"In what way?"

"Well, can you control his actions?"

"Perhaps."

"Will you aid me?" I went on.

"In any fair and reasonable way. But it is rather strange that you put these questions to me. If you will explain yourself more fully, perhaps I can be of service to you."

Now I did not, of course, know how much of Pando Kolo's secret was in possession of the Kahu; I had merely surmised that he knew something about it, and I did not want the Kahu to be made aware of my own knowledge. I simply wanted to get the Kahu to exert his influence on the fellow, so that, through superstitious fear, he would keep away from the treasure cave. Of course, I felt certain that Kolo had kept away from the place where the diamonds were secreted

through his fear of the ancient gods; but now, when he was aware that others also knew the secret, he probably had determined to run the risk involved.

I wanted to enlist the Kahu's services in our behalf, and feeling that the man was purchasable I determined to offer him a sum of money to dissuade Kolo from going to the burning mountain. With this in view I drew my pocketbook and took from it a ten-dollar gold-piece and placed it on the table before the Kahu.

"What is this for?" he asked, picking up the coin and placing it in his vest pocket.

"For yourself," I replied. "You will do me a service, I know."

"Explain it."

"Persuade Kolo that he must not go to the burning mountain of Kiwoku."

"Why?"

"For his own good."

"And your benefit," put in the Kahu with a sly look and a slight grin.

"You may think as you please. We leave Manila to-morrow. Keep Kolo here, and you shall receive a further compensation."

"How shall you arrange that?"

"I shall leave a sum of money with the clerk at the Queen Hotel with instructions to hand it

over to you twelve hours after we leave, provided that you appear there to claim the money with Pando Kolo in your company."

"That seems fair, and I shall prevent him from going."

"Of course, you understand I do not wish him any harm, simply prevent him from going. I cannot explain to you my reasons for this, but I shall make it worth your while."

Then we came to an agreement as to the amount that the Kahu was to receive from me, and it was also arranged that he should be present when the money was deposited at the hotel office, so that the clerk could identify him and also so that he, the Kahu, might be sure of my good faith.

I arose, and was about to go, when, just as the Kahu was about to say something further, there was a call for him at the rear of the house. Requesting me to be seated again, until he should return, he left the room.

Without intending to be an eavesdropper, I heard the voice of Pando Kolo as he came into the house and was ushered into a room near where I was.

"Kolo, why are you here?" I heard the Kahu ask.

I could not see into the room where they were,

but from the sounds that reached me I judged that Kolo stood in great awe of the Kahu.

"I am come, great priest," said the native with trembling in his voice, "to ask your help."

"How so?"

"I have enemies who would rob me, and I wish to make them weak. Prevent then in their plans, and I shall make you many presents of great value. You know I am called the Diamond King—there is a reason for it. I am not of weak mind. I stand in fear only of our ancient gods. Many years have I held the secret, and but a short time ago Bili removed the ban. He came to me when I was hurt and graciously gave me permission to remove the treasure."

I recalled then how Oliver had personated the god at the hut where Kolo lay in a stupor.

Continuing, Kolo said: "Your power is great, oh, priest of our ancient worship; help me against the foreigners; cause them to be held back."

"How many are there of your enemies?" inquired the Kahu; and I knew by the sound of his voice that he was surprised, probably thinking that I was alone.

"There are three young men who have discovered the secret through a map left by others, who hid the treasure."

"Is this map in their possession?"

"It is."

"How do you know it?"

"In many ways. It is a long story. It would take long to tell it. Promise your help, and I shall pour treasure at your feet."

"You must procure something personal from them before I can help you, Kolo; a lock of hair, a tooth, a nail paring, some such thing." (I have since learned that these are used in working the sorcery of the Kanas.)

"I shall get them if you will promise to help me."

"I cannot promise you yet; I must consult the ancient gods: I must commune with them; I doubt if they will allow you to proceed."

"Say not so. I have told you that Bili has given me permission."

"You may have been mistaken. I shall see."

"Will you help me if the gods permit?"

"I will."

I heard someone rush out of the room. Then I heard the voice of the Kahu shouting: "This way! this way!" while there was the sound of hurrying feet in the hall.

Almost in an instant Pando Kolo stopped opposite the door of the room in which I sat. I tried to conceal myself, but it was too late. Kolo saw me. A look of blank amazement came over his

face and then he ran into the room. He tried to seize me, but I dodged and escaped him. His face was working with passion, and he looked like a very demon. He ran around the table with arms outstretched. I moved quickly away, and shouted at him: "Are you crazy? What do you mean?" So great was his rage, he was at a loss for words.

By this time the Kahu had come into the room. He fixed his eyes on Kolo, who almost collapsed with fear. His eyes were riveted on the face of the Kahu. It seemed to me then that the old priest was possessed of hypnotic power, so great was the influence of his gaze on Kolo, who gradually cowered and cowered, until he crouched on the floor in a heap at the feet of the Kahu.

Without a word the Kahu turned on his heel and left the room. Kolo arose and followed him like a whipped dog.

Left alone in the room, I began to think I would do well to leave the house, when the Kahu came in.

His manner was entirely unruffled. There was not the faintest trace of excitement in his face nor in his voice when he spake to me.

"Be not alarmed," he said; "leave the house and I shall see you at the Queen's Hotel this evening as we have arranged."

"How about Kolo?" I whispered.

"Leave him to me. I shall convince him that what has just happened was but a dream on his part."

I was about to say more when the Kahu held up a warning finger, and then gently taking me by the arm he led me to the front door.

Opening the door, he smiled pleasantly and bowed. I passed out and the door was softly closed. About a hundred feet down the street on the opposite side I saw Don and Oliver. As I was coming up to them Don sung out cheerily: "Well, how did you make out?" while Oliver said: "I thought you were killed, you stayed so long."

I told the story to my brothers and they were full of wonder and amazement.

"That Kahu is a bird," remarked Oliver.

"Do you think he will do as he says?" inquired Don.

"I believe he will. There was something about him that gave me confidence in him," I replied.

"What makes you think so, Frank?" queried Oliver, who seemed to have his doubts about the old priest.

"Well," I replied, "for one thing he has got my money, and he thinks there is more to follow,

while Kolo he knows is a good deal of a maundering fool. The Kahu will surely be at the hotel to-night."

"I guess that's right," remarked Don.

Then we rode back to Manila, and after a good supper we waited for our visitor.

Promptly on time the Kahu came, and with him was Kolo. At first I was startled, and so were Oliver and Don, to see the native there, but I was assured by the Kahu that the Diamond King did not recognize us—in fact, could not, because he was under some occult influence. He had been brought along by the Kahu so that the hotel clerk might be sure of the man—the Kahu being unaware whether or not the hotel clerk knew the so-styled king.

As far as necessary we explained things to the hotel clerk, who at first did not understand what we were driving at; but we told him to simply deliver a package which we handed to him,—and whose contents the Kahu had seen,—to the Kahu at a certain hour on the next day when he would come for it. He was, of course, not to deliver it unless the Kahu was accompanied by Kolo.

The matter being at last understood, the Kahu and Kolo departed. Not once, in all the time that he was at the hotel, did Kolo show that he knew us. He seemed to be in a kind of dazed

state that looked somewhat like drunkenness, but he did not stagger and not once did I hear him speak.

We retired for the night, and the next morning we were up bright and early. We took a stroll around the town and then returned to the hotel. Our baggage was all packed, and we had this taken down to the dock, where lay the inter-island steamer *Palawan*, which was to take us to the town of Rumida, on the southeast coast of Luzon, Rumida being some fifty miles from the burning mountain which we were so eager to visit.

CHAPTER XVI.

OFF FOR THE BURNING MOUNTAIN.

"OFF at last!" cried Oliver, as we slipped down the bay of Manila. It was a perfect day, and all of us felt in the best of spirits.

"Yes, off at last," came from Don. "And may we find the Diamond Treasure without further trouble!"

"I hope the Kahu keeps his word," I said. "I want no more to do with either Pando Kolo or Cal Bender."

There is no necessity to describe the run out of Manila Bay and down the coast and past Mindoro and Masbate. We were out of sight of land most of the time, and nothing of interest occurred during the trip. A night was spent on the *Palawan*, and at sunrise we sighted Rumida and two hours later ran into the harbor and dropped anchor.

Rumida is well called the Beautiful. Its beach of dark sand lies in a crescent enfolding the bay. When we had landed, the beauty of the place almost entranced us—it seemed like some fairy-

land. Beside almost every road there are bubbling brooks that dash along merrily. Their banks are covered with flowers and ferns of exquisite colors. Vegetation here was exuberant. Tall banana trees were in many dooryards and clustered around were roses and lilies.

"Alfredo Boez!" cried Don in a subdued voice, nudging me in the side.

"Where?"

"Just ahead. See, he is turning the corner."

"True enough!"

"I wonder what he is doing here?" put in Oliver as we came to a halt.

"You may depend on it, for no good purpose," answered Don. "You stay here. I am going to follow him."

"No, no!" I cried, laying my hand on my brother to detain him. "It won't do! He may discover that you are following him. We'd better not pay any attention to his movements. Let him go his way and we will go ours. 'Don't trouble trouble till trouble troubles you,' I've always found a good maxim to follow."

"Yes, that's so," said Don.

"Besides," put in Oliver "we have the advantage of him now: we know he is here, but he doesn't know that we are."

"Let us go at once to the Rest," I said; this

being the place at which we were to stay while in Rumida.

We went on and turned into a street two blocks beyond where we had seen Alfredo Boez. As we went into the street whom should we see coming towards us but the Spaniard.

When we passed him, as luck would have it, there was a man with a balky horse coming along the street. The horse shied at something and began cutting capers—making a great commotion. Boez was quite near the animal, and sprang out of the way to avoid being trampled on. As he did so he stumbled and fell. Don sprang forward and dragged the Spaniard out of harm's reach.

By the help of Don, Oliver, and myself, Alfredo Boez was soon on his feet again. He started to thank us, when he suddenly recognized us and scowled darkly.

We looked at him silently to see what he would do or say. He remained silent with a hateful look on his features.

Don, irritated at the fellow's attitude, and unable to contain himself, blurted out: "Well, don't you appreciate it?"

I took hold of Don to lead him away, for I wanted to avoid a scene, when the Spaniard stepped close to us and shaking his finger in our faces said with a hissing sound: "I would rather

be dead than owe anything to an accursed Americano!"

We drew back in surprise, for while our experience with Spaniards had been somewhat extensive, yet we did not dream that the man would not have at least a spark of gratitude in his composition.

Disgusted with the fellow, we turned to go away, when he called after us: "We shall meet again, Americanos!"

And so we parted.

We went to bed early that night, and I never slept sounder in all my life. The air at Rumida is very pure, although it seems damp.

Bright and early we arose, and after breakfast we strolled through the town. We found there were quite a number of business places there, all well stocked with merchandise. As we went along we saw a sign on which were painted these words: "Horses to let for tourists. Reliable guides and reasonable rates."

We went into the livery stable office—such it proved to be—and inquired their rates. We soon came to terms, and in a little while all mounted, and accompanied by a guide whose name we made out to be Sandy, or something of the sort, we set out in the direction of the great Humbobo Falls, to view the sights and to learn

something of the route to the burning mountain.

After considerable difficulty the falls were reached, and dismounting we crept over the rocks to view the water as it thundered down hundreds of feet into the boiling basin below.

"Grand, eh!" cried Oliver.

"It's immense," I replied. "I never saw anything to equal it."

To get a still better place to see, Don had gone out on a projecting ledge of rocks, although he had been warned by the guide that it was a hazardous proceeding. As he stood there clearly outlined, two shots rang out in quick succession.

CHAPTER XVII.

THINGS THAT HAPPENED.

DON tumbled over on his side and Oliver and I ran to his assistance.

“Are you hurt, Don?” I queried, bending down over my fallen brother.

“I don’t know, Frank,” he answered, trying to rise.

Oliver and I got him on his feet, and we noticed blood trickling down over his left cheek. A hasty examination revealed the fact that he had received a grazing shot just over the left ear. It was only superficial, and we soon stopped the flow of blood. Then we led Don away from the ledge.

We began to wonder whether our brother had been shot by accident or design—thinking there might be some hunters in the neighborhood—when another shot rang out. It flew wide of us, but we hastened to seek shelter behind a near-by boulder of great size.

As we hurried on, I glanced up at the sloping side of the bluff that towered above the path by which we had come down, and there, ensconced

in the undergrowth and foliage that covered the earth, I saw the broken outlines of a man. I called Oliver's attention to it, and he declared that it looked like Boez. Under the shelter of the boulder we debated what was to be done. I peeped out cautiously to see if the man was still in the brush.

"Help! help! murder!" rang out high above us. The voice was the voice of Sandy the guide.

Up the path we started, Oliver, Don, and I, for while we tried to dissuade Don from going with us yet he insisted, claiming that he was not badly hurt.

The cries continued as we scrambled upward. The way was very steep and tortuous, and we had much trouble in avoiding loose stones that threatened to trip us and send us rolling downward. We had drawn our pistols, and as we reached the top we were ready to use them.

Where our horses were tied two men were rolling and tumbling over each other. They were Sandy and Alfredo Boez.

"Let up, man!" cried Sandy. "I've done ye no harm."

"You spy on me. You shall die!" yelled Boez.

They did not hear us as we came closer, and Boez had his pistol at Sandy's ear when Don gave

the Spaniard a swinging blow from behind that sent him flying. The pistol flew out of his hand and went off with a loud bang as it struck a rock. I hastily secured it and placed it in my pocket.

Sandy rose up and jumped on the Spaniard, pummeling him with all his might.

Boez, finding himself in a bad situation, pleaded for mercy.

"You are a would-be murderer, and don't deserve any mercy," said my brother.

"It is all a mistake," gasped Boez, while Sandy continued to pound away at him.

The horses, growing restless, demanded Sandy's attention, but it was with great reluctance that he ceased his castigation of our enemy.

"You must consider yourself our prisoner," said Don as the Spaniard arose from the ground.

"Your prisoner!" exclaimed Boez with a scowl on his battered face.

"Yes, our prisoner. We are going to land you in jail. It is not safe to have you strolling around with murder in your heart."

"Et ees all a meestake. I was shooting at wild birds. I did not know you was here."

"It's not true!" thundered Don, "you overheard our conversation at the hotel last night, and you came on here, ahead of us, with the deliberate intention of killing us. It is time you were shut

up behind the bars where you can't do any more harm. A creature like you is hardly fit to live."

"I shall not go with you. You cannot take me."

"We will see about that." Then addressing his remarks to Oliver and myself, Don continued: "You keep your guns on him, boys. If he makes a move to get away, wing him. I want to talk to Sandy."

Don walked away to where our guide was attending the horses. When he came back he said: "Now, boys, Sandy says there is a man lives about a mile from here who is an officer of the law. We will place Boez in his charge and then we will continue our day's outing. I don't propose to have it spoiled by such a scoundrel as this. Then he spoke to the Spaniard, saying: "Boez, at the word of command you must march on. If you make any attempt to escape you will be shot down like a dog. Do you understand?"

For answer Alfredo Boez shot out a look of hate at us that was horrid in its concentrated malignity.

Sandy brought a short strap to Don, and with this Boez' hands were bound together, not, however, without a struggle on the part of the Spaniard.

We mounted our horses, one after another taking turns in watching Boez until we were all in the saddle, with the exception, of course, of the Spaniard, who remained afoot.

When everything was in readiness we moved off, Boez in the van and we following with drawn pistols.

Down the rough and rock-strewn path we went until we reached the main road. Along this we moved in the same order until we were within a short distance of the house where, Sandy said, lived an officer of the law. Once our prisoner had refused to go another step, but the cold muzzle of Don's revolver placed under his ear caused the Spaniard to change his mind.

As we reached the summit of a slight rise in the road, we were startled by the sight of an immense herd of carabao, or water buffalo, coming up the opposite side of the hill. The animals were rushing along pell-mell, and the earth trembled with the pounding of their hoofs. The main body kept to the road, but many of them scattered to the right and to the left.

We were in a quandary, and knew not which way to turn. Sandy was at a loss for words to express his astonishment and concern. Finally he blurted out: "We've got to cut and run for it, or we shall all be trampled to death. There is no

time to lose," and with that he turned his horse and dashed away, shouting to us to come on.

For a moment we looked at the onrushing mass of horned cattle. It was a veritable sea of hides and horns that threatened to engulf us. Closer and closer it came. Boez stood stock-still, paralyzed with fear. He looked at us appealingly. We did not know what to do with him. To abandon him then, with his arms pinioned, would be little short of murder. Riding close to him, I bent down and unbuckled the strap that confined his hands. "Make for a tree!" I shouted; "it is your only chance."

Boez needed no urging. We saw him run for the woods, that grew on either side of the road, as we put spurs to our horses and dashed off after Sandy the guide.

On we went—ahead of us possible safety, behind us sure destruction. The bellowing of the carabaos made a horrid sound that I shall not soon forget. Our horses were frenzied by the noises of the cattle in our rear, and it was difficult to keep them under control. They sped along that mountain road with the speed that terror lends.

At a bend in the road we came up with Sandy, who was waiting for us.

"Thank your God, you're safe so far!" he cried. "Follow me closely now, and we will

soon be out of danger. The cattle will keep to the main road."

He dashed through a maze of tropical vegetation that threatened to trip our horses at almost every step, but the sure-footed island beasts were just as anxious as we were to escape from danger, and they made no false moves. Up we went until we came to a rise that overlooked the main road. The herd clattered by us on a run. Suddenly there sounded a cry for help. Then shriek followed shriek.

"Those are women's voices!" yelled Don, putting spurs to his horse and dashing off in the direction whence the sounds came.

We all followed, skirting the road by riding on the higher land on the right. Up hill and down vale we went, and the riding was about as rough as any I ever did. From rock to rock our horses leaped with the nimbleness of cats. Through the foliage we caught glimpses of the cattle. Soon we came to the place where the cries still sounded, although now they came fainter. Cautiously we peered through the foliage that hid the road from our view. Here a strange sight met our gaze. An overturned carriage lay in the road, and the horses that had drawn it were piled up beside it. On either side there was a hurrying stream of frenzied carabaos rushing by. The

whole confused mass of horses, carriage, and the people under it was but a few feet from our side of the road.

"We have got to do something for these people," cried Don, dismounting and hastily tying his horse to a tree.

"I think so, Don," said I, "but what can we do?"

Don glanced quickly around. We were in a fringe of woods that bordered the road, and on the ground lay a dead tree. It was not very large, and my brother began dragging it toward the road.

I got down from my horse and hitched him to a tree. "What are you going to do?" I questioned, at the same time taking hold of the tree and aiding him in his efforts.

"You will see presently," was the response.

"Come lend a hand," said Don, nodding to Oliver and Sandy. They dismounted quickly and fastened their animals close by mine.

"Now," cried Don, "up with her!"

The butt of the tree was now close to the road and as we put the tree on end I discovered Don's object. "Now we must let it fall carefully," said Don.

"Wait a minute!" cried Sandy, "I have a rope that we can——"

"No, no," interrupted Don, "we haven't time for that. When I give the word, let go."

Looking out at the moving mass my brother saw a little break: "Let her go!" he shouted, and we all sprang away.

For a moment the tree poised in the air, then it went over, directly in front of the overturned carriage. There it lay acting as a breakwater to the surging sea of cattle. The branches of the tree spread round and about the pile, effectually protecting it. The carabaos took the further side of the road thus enabling us to go to the aid of the people underneath the carriage.

Carefully pushing our way in, Don and I slightly lifted the overturned vehicle and peered under it. Two men and two ladies lay there with the seats of the carriage on top of them.

Sandy and Oliver coming to our aid, we soon lifted the vehicle a little more; and propping it up,—but not righting it because of the cattle still moving on the other side,—we were enabled, with a little care, to drag the seats out without injuring the people.

"Oh, me leg!" groaned one of the men.

"Are you badly hurt?" inquired Don, as he lay hold of the man and drew him out.

"By George!" exclaimed Don, "if this isn't Matt Capsan!"

"Indade it's mesilf," said that individual, "an' I belave I'm almost kilt intoirely!"

I remembered, as soon as I heard the name Matt Capsan, that he was one of the sailors of the *Golden Rover* who had sided with Captain Bartell against the mutineers, and who had left at Manila with us.

Matt could not walk well alone, so Oliver assisted him to a seat on a little rise of ground.

"Well! well!" I heard him exclaim, "and if this aint Oliver Folsom. But don't moind me now, b'y. Go an' assist the captain and the ladies."

"What captain?" inquired Oliver.

"Captain Bartell, of course—he's under the carriage."

I was busy with Don trying to extricate the people from under the carriage, doing my best; but when I heard the name of the captain I paused for a moment to inform Don of what I had heard.

"By Jove! Captain Bartell here!" exclaimed Don in a loud, surprised voice.

"Yes, my friends, I am here, and I can assure you I am in a very uncomfortable position," answered the captain.

We redoubled our exertions, and soon we had the satisfaction of getting them all out. They were considerably shaken up, but no bones were

broken. Both horses had been killed, one having his neck broken and the other being pierced through the chest by a thick splinter from the pole of the carriage. The carriage was a wreck.

"A miraculous escape!" muttered Captain Bartell, turning to give his attention to the ladies, who were in a highly nervous state.

The cattle had passed by now, but we could still hear the thunder of their hoofs as they rushed on.

From Matt Capsan we learned that he had drifted to Rumida and had there entered the service of a gentleman named Amos Vinton, who had married one of Captain Bartell's sisters. The captain, Mrs. Vinton, and another sister, were out driving, with Matt as coachman, when they met the herd of frenzied carabaos.

"Boys," said the sailor, "w'n I saw thim bastes comin' along the road, bejabers there was tin tousand of thim, if there was wan. I thought me toime had come, and I wished I was safe aboard a good ship!"

Captain Bartell succeeded in calming his sisters, and he turned to us. He opened his eyes wide in astonishment when we stepped forward to greet him.

"Well! well!" he exclaimed, "I never dreamed of meeting you here, and under these circumstances."

"Glad to have been of service to you," said Don, wringing his hand.

"I want to thank you all, my friends, and I invite you to visit me at my sister's home in Rumida. Let me introduce you."

We all stepped over to where the ladies were, and were introduced to those we had not met before. They were profuse in their expressions of gratefulness to us, but we disclaimed having done anything more than was natural under the circumstances.

Their horses being killed and the carriage entirely useless other means of getting the party back to the town had to be provided.

Our guide solved the problem by riding off to a plantation in the neighborhood and returning with a team of horses and a comfortable road-wagon.

Captain Bartell and his sisters took their seats in the wagon, with Matt holding the reins, and, accompanied by us, set off for their destination, which was a plantation some distance off the main road which led in the direction of the burning mountain.

We had turned off the main road, and had gone along for about a mile, when it began to rain. It came down in torrents, and we on horseback were drenched to the skin.

"This is a pretty wet country, captain," I said as the rain let up for a few minutes.

"Yes. I understand they have an average yearly rainfall of about one hundred and twenty-five inches. One day a storm brought seventeen inches of water!"

It continued raining, and everything was swimming. Little brooks became raging torrents. We had crossed a number of small bridges, and the water had risen almost to the planking.

"If we don't hurry, and there are any more bridges to cross," said Don to me, "I'm thinking the captain won't reach his destination to-night." It was then about five o'clock in the afternoon.

"Yes," I replied, that's so. These streams are getting so high that I'm afraid they will lift the bridges off their piers."

"Look! look!" cried Oliver in great alarm.

"Great Scott!" returned Don, pointing in the direction Oliver was pointing out.

A wall of water was bearing down on us. Just ahead was a bridge. Matt saw the danger and he lashed his horses into a gallop. Putting spurs to our animals we made for the bridge.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

THERE was a sound in the air like the booming of cannon as the torrent came on, uprooting trees and bearing on its surface great sticks of timber and masses of lumber from bridges it had destroyed in its destructive course.

The horses and the wagon were on the bridge when the mighty mass of water dashed against it, over it, under it, and all around it.

Screams and shrieks filled the air, only to be stifled by the roar of the waters as they swirled in foaming masses, engulfing horses, wagon, bridge, and the occupants of the vehicle.

We were but a short distance behind the wagon when it reached the bridge. Seeing there was no hope of getting over, and it being too late to get Matt to turn back, we dashed up the steep bank beside the road to escape the flood. Our horses seemed to realize the danger, and they scrambled up the slippery rocky slope with a courage born of fear.

The top of the slope was about twenty feet above the bed of the stream, and as the land on the other side was low and flat, allowing the water to spread out, we were comparatively safe.

Our first care, after getting up there, was to see if we could help the captain and his party.

"I'm afraid they are drowned," said Don sadly.

"I hope not," I replied. "See! the carriage has caught fast on a tree lower down the stream."

"Yes, that's so, but——" Don stopped, and as I looked at him I saw him bending down so that he could look under a projecting tree branch. "By Jove!" he went on, "the horses are down there struggling to get up the bank."

We ran down stream to the brutes and encouraged them with endearing words. After a brave struggle they reached the bank in safety, and we secured them.

Oliver, coming up in great excitement, told us that he had seen a woman's dress in a tree on the opposite bank. Whether it was only a dress or a woman, he was not sure.

We hurried back to the place, and looked over anxiously. We could see a piece of black skirt hanging down, but the foliage hid our view so that we could make out nothing more.

"It may be only a piece of dress," said Oliver.

"But possibly one of the ladies may have been thrown into the tree branches by the flood."

"Well, we must find out," declared Don as he raised his voice in a great shout.

Listening intently, we waited.

Again Don shouted.

We heard a faint muffled groan.

"It is someone," declared Oliver.

Just then we spied Matt on the opposite bank.

"Hey there, Matt Capsan!" shouted Don.

"Hello yourself!" replied the Irishman, "an' phere are yez?"

"Over here. Have you seen the captain?"

"I have. He's all right an' his sister Mrs. Vinton is wid him."

We set up a little cheer then, but I must confess it sounded dismal in the rain.

"Have you seen the other lady?" I sung out.

"I have not. I'm lookin' fur her now."

"Well, then, tell us what that is in the tree."

After a look around, and following the directions we gave him, Matt finally located the tree, and looking up into it he gave a shout.

"Saints preserve us! There's the lady!" he cried, standing in open-mouthed wonderment.

The rain ceased, and the water, while still running strongly, gradually subsided.

Don plunged into the foaming water, and being

a powerful swimmer managed, after considerable effort, and being carried far down the stream, to reach the other side. In a little while he stood beside Matt Capsan.

It was but a moment's work for him to climb into the tree. It took him some time to extricate the lady from her dangerous predicament, and soon we had the satisfaction of seeing her lowered to the ground by the help of the sailor. She was in a state of collapse, and it took much time and considerable effort on the part of Don to bring her around to a realization of the situation. Then my brother and Matt moved off with the lady, carrying her between them.

Oliver and I went to the spot where the wagon had caught in a tree. The water, we found, was only up to our knees; and wading in carefully, to avoid slipping into holes, we succeeded in extricating the road-wagon and dragging it up on the higher land. We found it but little damaged, so far as its carrying and rolling power was concerned, but it was pretty well scratched up and the seats were gone. With the help of Sandy we managed to get the harness—which was still on the horses, although in a somewhat delapidated condition—into passable shape, and we soon had the horses hitched to the vehicle.

Telling Oliver that I was going to see if I could

find a place where we could ford, I mounted my own horse and rode off down stream.

A little way off I came to a wide but shallow place. The water was running swiftly over a ripple of small stones. I urged my horse in, and I found that we could cross with little difficulty.

Riding back, I made known my discovery, and Sandy volunteered to drive the team and wagon if we would take charge of his own horse as well as of Don's. This was quickly arranged, and we set out for the fording-place.

We got along very well, considering the nature of the place, with its steep slope and rocky surface. The horses needed some urging to get them to take the ford, but the application of "long oats," as Sandy denominated a good-sized switch which he cut, soon forced them in and over. We were now in a field that was soggy with water, and our progress was not very rapid. As we rode slowly along, wondering where to go, we encountered Matt.

"I was jist comin' to tell yez," said he, with a broad grin on his face, brought there probably by sight of the carriage and horses, "where we was. We have found a little house just over the hill beyant, and the captain, the ladies, and Don is all there."

"Good!" I cried. "So they've found shelter?"

“Indade, an’ we have. It’s a foine little place, an’ I’d loike to own it mesilf.”

“How are the ladies?” inquired Oliver.

“They are doin’ foine under the captain’s care.”

Matt then took charge of the team and carriage and Sandy mounted his own horse, and Don’s was fastened to the rear of the wagon.

A short drive further on, and then a turn to the right brought us to a neat cottage embowered in a mass of tropical vegetation. We were met at the gate by Don, who was much surprised that we had recovered the wagon.

The owner of the place, a well-educated native, came out then, and invited us in to get dry. He was a very hospitable man and did everything he could to make us comfortable.

Our horses were taken to a barn in the rear and their needs looked after by Sandy, Matt, and a native boy.

Captain Bartell greeted us as we came into the house, and in answer to our inquiries said that his sisters were doing very well under the circumstances. Of course we compared remembrances of our encounter with the flood and considered it little short of a miracle that we had escaped with so little real injury.

“Well, well!” exclaimed the captain, indulging

in a little laugh; "I thought when I came here that I should find it a dull, slow place, but I must say the place is getting pretty rapid—two narrow escapes from death in one day is too much. I don't wonder that my sisters are in a highly nervous state."

We, being much younger, thought it highly exhilarating.

It had now cleared off, and the ground was rapidly drying, but the brooks and water-courses were still running at full capacity.

After we were thoroughly dried, a bountiful supper was placed before us, to which we did ample justice. We talked over the events of the day and planned out what we should do next. Our host, overhearing some of our talk, informed us that it would be impossible to continue the journey at present as another bridge on the road had been washed away by the flood. "Besides," he said, "the captain has decided to remain here over night; his sisters are in no condition to go on until to-morrow, at least."

"Well, then," said Don, "with your kind permission we will remain; although I am afraid we are imposing on your good nature."

"Not at all," returned the Filipino smilingly. I have remarked before that the natives are a thoroughly hospitable people; and, in all my ex-

perience with them, I have never had reason to think otherwise. But sad to say, their generosity has sometimes been imposed upon.

After supper we were entertained by stories which our host related, and by the singing of his daughter, a miss of fourteen, who accompanied herself on the guitar, which she played surprisingly well.

We sat on the veranda that ran along one side of the house, and which was an ideal place, with its hammocks and easy chairs. The moon shone brightly while the big-leaved vegetation cast dense shallows. I was really entranced by the beauty of the scene and the delightful pureness of the air.

The little miss knew many well-known songs, and we all joined in and had a good time.

I shall never forget that night; it is one of the most delightful in my memory. And I think it safe to say that it is so with both Don and Oliver, judging from the enthusiastic way in which they sometimes recall it.

It was late when we retired, and being thoroughly tired out we slept like "logs."

I was the first of our party to awake. I arose, dressed myself, and went downstairs. Breakfast was preparing and I went outside and took a stroll about the place.

Taking a lane that led through a grove of cocoanut palms, I soon came to a wide brook that ran along merrily. Its banks were covered with a dense growth of ferns, and there were many lofty trees of various species. A canoe floated gracefully on the bosom of the brook fastened to a tree on shore by a rope.

I stepped into the craft and picked up the paddle, which was handsomely inlaid at the handle with bone and pearl in a fanciful and beautiful design, to examine its workmanship. The canoe bobbed up and down with the motion of the water. I began to speculate on the ownership of the boat when my thoughts were interrupted by the voice of the miss who had sung for us so entertainingly the previous evening.

Looking up, I greeted her with a cheerful "good-morning," and we were soon discussing the merits of the canoe. She cast off the fastening, and sprang into the craft, laughing merrily. Seizing the paddle, she said in a musical voice: "We shall have a ride before breakfast."

The canoe shot from shore in a twinkling, and the water from the blades, as she thrust them gracefully into the brook, glistened in the sunlight like flashing pearls. Down the stream we went swiftly and noiselessly. The waters broadened until they formed a miniature lake. On

either side the land sloped upward to hill on hill, until the gigantic mountain o'ertopped them.

We started on the return, keeping close to shore. We passed native huts with gardens running to the water's edge.

Seated on a bench in a summer-house at the foot of a garden I saw—Alfredo Boez!

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT BOEZ TRIED TO DO.

THE Spaniard saw me at the same time that I saw him and he arose with an exclamation of surprise. He raised his hand and shouted.

"Do you know him?" questioned my companion, ceasing to paddle.

"Yes, but I am sorry that I do," I replied.

"Oh!"

"He is a bad fellow."

"Then we'd better go on."

"One minute! I should like to hear what he has to say."

Alfredo Boez beckoned for me to come ashore.

"What do you want?" I shouted.

"I wish to speak to you alone," he replied, walking down to the water as close as he could.

I considered the matter a moment, and then asked the girl to paddle closer to shore. This she did; and then I saw that the Spaniard looked like a tramp. His clothes were torn and he had a generally disheveled appearance.



ALFREDO BOEZ AND THE MAD CATTLE.—Page 147.

"I had a bad time with the cattle," he said, noticing my gaze at his apparel.

"Yes?" I returned with a questioning look; "how was that?"

"Well, you see, I climb the tree w'en you let me go—and I thank you for that, Americano. The bulls came rushing on. Some fall down. Others fall on top of them and up three four high they come. They shake the tree, which is a small one, till I fall out. Ha!" He clenched his hands and gritted his teeth. "I fall on them and roll off. I run, run, run, till I fall again in the brush, down in a big hole. My clothes all torn, see!" He pointed at his tattered garments. "But I was safe. I climb up after a time and look out, the cattle are gone. What shall I do? I run around, till last night I came here. Your must help me. Nobody here knows me. What shall I do? I have lost all my money."

"You are in bad luck, certainly," I replied, "but you can blame no one but yourself for it."

Boez scowled and turned away.

While the fellow deserved but little pity, yet I could not help feeling sorry for him. I put my hand in my pocket and drew out two Spanish dollars, which I tossed to him after calling out his name.

He turned in time to catch the coins.

"That will help you to get back to Rumida," I said.

"You have my pistol," he said.

"I have," I replied.

"Give it to me."

"I will not."

"Why, are you afraid?"

"Not of you, Mr. Don; but you don't deserve it. You are too reckless; you shoot at my friends."

"I will promise not to interfere with them."

"I can't trust you."

"Then you will not give it to me?"

"Certainly not."

Then the Spaniard, in great rage, flung the coins at my head, but he being a poor marksman, they went wide of the mark and fell splashing into the water.

"I will get them for you later on," said the girl with an arch look.

"Oh, you may keep them for your trouble when you get them," I said.

"Thank you, but I shall return them to you."

"Americano!" shouted Boez, beside himself with rage. "Look out for yourself. I swear revenge against you all."

"Let me tell you something," I replied. "I would advise you to get away from here as soon

as you can, or before you know it you will be in jail. Don't be foolish, but take my advice."

Shaking his fist at me, Alfredo Boez disappeared in the shrubbery near the native house.

Again the canoe flew through the water, and I paid but little heed to my surroundings, so busy was I with my own thoughts.

The voice of my companion aroused me. "I am going back another way. There is a little stream there on the left. It is not very wide, but we can easily get through it, and it is much shorter; but we will have to walk a little further to our house when we stop."

I looked and saw a narrow gorge on our left that was almost concealed by vegetation, but as we approached it I saw that it was sufficiently wide for several canoes side by side.

The water was not very deep, except in places. The banks or walls were quite high, perhaps from twenty to thirty feet, and very precipitous. In places the trees and bushes formed a lattice-work roof to the gorge, and with the light streaming down through the interstices thus formed, the effect was quite novel and pretty.

We had gone on in his curious waterway for some distance when we heard a crash overhead, and the next instant a large rock fell just in front of the canoe with a loud splash.

We both were startled.

"Why, this is a dangerous place!" I said.

"Oh, no!" replied the girl; "someone must have thrown that."

While she was speaking she brought the canoe under a large projecting ledge.

"Here we are safe," she said.

"By George," I muttered to myself, "can it be Boez?"

While I was still debating the matter, and wondering what was to be done under the circumstances, there was another crash and the projecting ledge trembled with the blow of a large boulder rolled down on to it from above. The boulder rolled over the edge and into the stream, creating waves that rocked the canoe so fiercely that it threatened to capsize; but the consummate skill of the native lass kept it from turning over.

I was boiling with rage. I felt sure now that it was that scoundrel Boez. I was sorry that I had taken pity on him. He was a merciless wretch. He was willing to kill not only me, who had done him several good turns, but this innocent native girl who was in no way concerned in our affairs.

I drew my revolver, and saw that it was properly loaded. I bade the girl bring the canoe close to the shore. This she did, and I found that

I could get a footing without exposing myself to our enemy.

Cautiously I crept along under the overhanging brush and vines, being careful not to disturb them, until I came to a spot behind a big rock that projected from the side wall. It was overhung with a large-leaved bush, which screened me, but allowed me to peep up at the top of the gorge. Gazing upward I waited patiently. In a moment I saw a man peering over the edge of the gorge. It was Alfredo Boez, and there was a look of demoniacal rage on his distorted features. He was poising a large rounded stone preparatory to pushing it over on to the projecting ledge, when I pointed my revolver at him, took careful aim, and fired.

The stone rolled down and splintered off a great piece of the ledge.

The girl cried out, and I scrambled back to aid her. I was afraid that she had been killed or badly wounded.

I found that a big piece of the rock had pierced the bottom of the canoe, which at once filled and sunk. The girl was in the water, and quickly she swam toward me. She hardly needed my help, but I reached out and drew her up on the foothold.

"Are you hurt?" I inquired.

"Oh, no!" she replied with a rueful look; "but my canoe!"

"Yes, it is too bad. Perhaps it can be fixed."

"I hope so."

Then I began to wonder if I had hit the Spaniard. I had heard no cry; but then—I thought—it may have been drowned by the crashing of the boulder as it tore down the rocky wall and splintered the ledge.

I peeped out cautiously, and looked up. I could see nothing but the slightly inclined wall of rock covered with ferns and vegetation. It was perfectly silent there in the gorge and on the bluff. It was a dangerous hazard to scale the rocky side, but I determined to do it. As I made a move to go the girl seized my arm.

"You must not go!" she cried in suppressed alarm.

"There is nothing else to be done."

"It is too dangerous. You may be killed. Perhaps if you fire your pistol someone may come to help us. Try it, before you go up there."

The idea was a good one, and I wondered why I had not thought of it before.

Pointing my pistol straight up in the air I emptied the remaining charges in rapid succession. Then I proceeded to reload.

"Are we far from the house?" I asked.

"It is but a short distance away," she replied.

"Then the shots could easily be heard?"

"I think so."

We waited and listened.

"Perhaps you'd better fire again; they may be looking, but cannot tell the exact location," said the girl after we had waited some time.

Acting on her suggestion, I again fired. At the second shot, I heard a shout, and in a short time I saw Don, Oliver, and several others peering over the bluff.

I sprang into full view and the girl followed me.

"Well! well!" cried Oliver, "what are you doing down there?"

"I'll tell you some other time," I replied; "just now I think you'd better take a look around for Alfredo Boez."

"Alfredo Boez!" cried Don; "is he here?"

"He was a short time ago," I replied.

"What was he doing?"

"Trying to kill us."

"How."

"Rolling down bowlders."

"A pretty wretch he is!"

"See if you can find him. I shot at him, but I don't know whether I hit him or not. I hope I did."

Don gave directions to Oliver to help us, saying that he was going to search for the Spaniard. The boat being useless, and there being no other way out of our predicament, the girl and I proceeded to climb the steep wall of the gorge by means of the vines and mass of vegetation growing there.

As we neared the top the ascent became more difficult; but aided by Oliver and the others, we managed to crawl over the edge.

Once on top we were plied with questions innumerable. We answered them all, and expressed our gratification that the shots had been heard.

"So that scoundrel Boez is around, eh?" said Oliver as we walked along.

"Yes," I replied, "and I almost think it would have been better if I had not loosened his bonds yesterday when we met the frenzied cattle."

When we came to the house, we were greeted by Captain Bartell and his sisters, who were now quite recovered from the shock they had received. Of course we had to tell our adventure, and the ladies made quite a heroine of the little lass. And, I must say, she was quite as calm under trying circumstances as anyone could be.

Don came back after a while and reported that

he had scoured around, but had been unable to see anything of our enemy.

After a good wash and straightening out, we all sat down to breakfast. There was fruit of all kinds in profusion. Strawberries grown on the place, with rich cream from native cattle, formed a delicious part of the meal. Coffee made from berries grown right there on the northern part of the island, made a satisfactory drink. In fact, almost everything we had—and the meal was no mean one—was grown on that wonderfully prolific island.

“Let us start for the treasure cave to-day,” said Don when we had finished our meal and had gone out on the veranda.

“All right,” said Oliver. “I’m anxious to start at once.”

“I am willing,” I said.

“Then we will go to-day,” said Don.

CHAPTER XX.

OFF FOR THE TREASURE-CAVE.

WE went out to the stable to take a look at our horses and have a talk with Sandy the guide.

"Well," said Sandy, when we told him that we were going on to the volcano. "I'll send word to my boss where we are going. He may be anxious about us, for he expected we would be back last night, you know."

"Do so," said Oliver.

After thanking our host for his hospitality we bade them all good-by and mounted our horses. As we rode out they were all gathered on the veranda wishing us good luck and a pleasant time.

"Be sure and call on us when you come back," called out Captain Bartell; and we promised to do so at the first opportunity.

"B'ys, I hopes to see you ag'in," shouted Matt.

At last we were off for the greatest volcano on the island of Luzon. Sandy led the way and Oliver, Don, and I followed.

The road led through a forest of tropical luxuriance. The air was heavy with a moist



fragrance. There was a great variety of trees consisting of bamboos, acacias, pandanus, and other kinds. Covering them were networks of vines and tree-ferns. Brilliant blossoms dotted the whole with an infinite variety of color. The earth was covered with plush-like moss of delicate texture and of most beautiful green color. And in every spot and place not otherwise occupied were innumerable varieties of ferns, from gigantic bird's-nests to the tiniest lace-like creations.

On we went, until we came to the upper woods. We were tired and our horses needed a breathing spell. After a short rest we continued our journey through the woods until we came to something of a village at the very edge of the burning mountain, where we put up at one of the houses. Before we reached this village an unearthly glare burst upon our sight. Smoke was rising, and there was a lurid mass of clouds that hung suspended, swaying back and forth in the sky. Sandy told us the place was called The House of the Fire-God.

We found excellent accommodation both for ourselves and for our horses. A cheerful fire greeted us as we opened the door, for at this altitude the air was chilly. After a pleasant repast we strolled outside to take a look around.

"Now," said Don, when we were alone on the veranda overlooking the burning mountain, from which we could see the glare and reflections from the great crater, "to-morrow we will each take a guide and explore for ourselves; then we will compare notes and afterward decide what is best to do."

After a little discussion, this was agreed to, and we separated, each following his own inclinations. Now, after Pando Kolo's description of the way to reach the hidden treasure in the secret cave,—which we had obtained through Oliver's ruse,—I thought it much easier to locate the cave by the Tagal's maunderings than it was to follow Victor O. Munn's description of the route. His map, of course, might prove very useful.

I got into conversation with a Spanish-American gentleman who was well posted on the crater, and he gave me an interesting account of the great volcano.

"I suppose this is your first visit to the volcano?" inquired my companion as we were seated before the cheerful fire at the village hotel, if such I may call it.

"Yes," I replied; "I shall have to get a guide to take me about."

"Oh, you need not do that; I will show you about gladly. There isn't a nook or cranny of

the crater that I do not know. Why, I could go there at night and know my way about."

"You must have been here a long time."

"I have. I have lived here for five years—that is, in the neighborhood."

After a little further conversation, he suggested that we take a walk outside along the edge of the crater. I fell in with his notion, and we were soon traveling along a path that wound in and out of a mass of rock and vegetation. The night was a perfect one. The moon was bright and the stars shone brilliantly. The glare from the crater produced a weird and unearthly effect. Here arose a vapory cloud tinged with dull orange and red, there a spray of steam sizzled and hissed like a steaming caldron.

The path led downward over rocks jumbled and tumbled into all sorts of strange and fantastic positions and shapes. There were various lakes in the burning mountain, and they were in almost constant activity; and it was indeed a strange and moving sight to look down into that volcanic pit some five hundred feet deep and nearly a mile in circumference.

Carefully we descended down its rugged sides until we stood on the floor of the volcano. Jets of steam arose here and there and puffed out from projecting rocks.

As we stepped on the black glistening floor of the volcanic pit, it sounded like the crunching of snow covered with a crust of ice as we moved on. My companion informed me that the lava cooling rapidly forms a thin vitreous layer resembling glass in its nature. It is exceedingly hard and very brittle.

Going along we came to a hillock of lava. It was outlined in a mass of bent, twisted, involuted, convoluted, distorted shapes that suggested fantastic forms of strange unearthly reptiles and beasts. Then at another turn it seemed to bear a resemblance to trees, with exposed roots and gnarled trunks all bent by some gigantic power into a mass of contorted shapes that defy description.

Beyond was a cave, and, as we approached, strange noises sounded underneath the floor that seemed to be the suppressed cries of imprisoned spirits. My companion thrust his walking stick into the cone, and it trembled like a powerful engine under a full head of steam. The roar was deafening.

"I don't wonder the ignorant native is superstitious," I said to my companion, for the uncanny place with its mysterious sounds and strange conditions had impressed me wonderfully.

He began to laugh in a quiet way that piqued me, and I said, "Why do you laugh?"

"Well," said he, "about a year ago I was much amused by the strange actions of a native on the other side of the crater."

"How was that?"

"I was on the edge of the crater—not the edge of the lake of fire, understand—when I saw this native come along a path on which I was strolling. He was mumbling to himself in the native tongue—which I understand. He did not perceive me, and I stepped aside behind a large rock to let him pass. He was still mumbling to himself, and I knew that it was some kind of an invocation to Bili the King of Fire. I could not exactly catch the drift of his ideas, but he seemed to want him to give him some sign that he was not angry with him for something that he was about to do. I followed him cautiously as he went down along the path, for I was curious to see the outcome."

"Yes," I said eagerly, as the gentleman paused for a moment to look around him.

"Well, that fellow's actions have been a mystery to me ever since."

"Why so? What did he do?"

"The Kana went on until he came to a large mass of lava piled up into a mound. He went up

to it and then gazed eagerly about him. There was no one in sight, for I was safely hidden from view, and I watched him with the greatest curiosity in the world. There were spurts of steam and sulphurous vapor all about him, and the curious maneuvers he went through reminded me of ancient heathenish rules that I have read about. He would prostrate himself in the most abject way; then he would suddenly arise and strut along proudly. A rumbling noise quickly sent him down again. A sudden flash or glare of light would cause him to tremble violently. Then he would walk along slowly and with a serpent-like motion. He at last came to a kind of hollow under a projecting ledge of lava that cropped out from the wall of the crater. Into this I saw him disappear. He had been gone but about five minutes when there was a terrific explosion in one of the smaller lakes. A column of fire and lava rose full fifty feet in the air. A vile sulphurous smoke filled the neighborhood with an unearthly ghastly glare; and, in the midst of it I saw the native dart from the cave-like opening in a very frenzy of terror and fear. A cry from his lips sounded out that gave me a cold chill. I felt like fleeing from the spot, but there was a strange sort of fascination about the whole thing that held me spellbound.

“I eagerly watched to see what he would do

next. He fell on his knees and remained there a long while. Several smaller reports followed the first one in irregular succession. Then, when the noises had ceased, the fellow got up and again approached the hollow. Again he disappeared from my view, and I waited a long time to see the outcome of his performances. I wondered what he was doing, and being eager to know I left my hiding-place to get closer. As I did so there was a loud dull rumbling under the floor of the crater, followed by the most weird and unearthly sounds I ever heard. They sounded like the shrieks of furies. Now shrill, high, and whistling, dying away in a low sickening moan that almost froze my blood. The floor trembled and shook like the deck of a ship that has struck on the rocks. The air grew dense with a horrid mixture of sickly colors; a fierce rush of pent-up gases burst from the fissures in the glossy black floor of the volcano. The floor split in a hundred new places. Flame and steam issued from the surrounding rock in a way that seemed like the mad thrust of infuriated demons at an unseen foe. A tremendous rending sound crashed beneath my feet, and great blocks of lava rose in the air, only to fall back into the seething, boiling fluid of the small lake with a loud splash that sent the fiery waves washing over the edge."

My companion ceased, and seemed to be lost in

his remembrance of the scene. I was all curiosity to hear more. I was fascinated with his description of the wonderful phenomenon of the volcano. I began to trace a resemblance between Kolo and the native my companion was describing. Were they the same? Was I on the brink of a discovery? I was anxious to learn more. Did this man know more than he was going to tell me? Had he investigated the cave? Had he discovered the treasure? Was our coming useless, after all?

"Go on!" I cried, with barely repressed excitement.

"Oh, yes," he said, passing his hand over his brow as though brushing away some obstruction to his memory.

"The native—what became of him?" I questioned eagerly.

"I saw him flee from the place in a very panic," replied my companion.

"What was he doing in there?"

"I don't know; perhaps something connected with a heathenish rite."

"Did you enter at the cave to see?"

"I did, later on."

"Can you show me the cave?"

"I can. Come on."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TREASURE-CAVE.

As we went along I noticed several places that tallied with what Kolo had described in his delirium when Oliver had taken the part or character of Bili. The farther we went the more convinced I became that I was on the right track of discovery.

“What did you see in the cave?” I said to my companion, for I was burning to know the worst, or the best, as the case might be.

“I penetrated the opening for a considerable distance and then I came to a rough wall that inclosed the end of the passage,” replied my companion.

“Was there nothing in the cave?” I questioned anxiously.

“It was quite dark in there at first; but, after a while, I became accustomed to it, and besides there was a little rift in the rocks above that let in a beam of light. In looking around I found a box of curious workmanship——” I gave a

gasp. There was a tightening at my throat that gave me a strange feeling.

"I guess these fumes are getting too much for you," said my companion, looking at me.

"Oh, no! it will pass," I replied. But, oh, how anxious I felt to learn more!

"This box!" I gasped—"was there anything in it?"

"Nothing whatever. I think the native must have dropped it there in his fright."

Now I was tortured anew by the thought that Pando Kolo and this native were not the same person. Perhaps another knew the secret, and had taken away the diamonds, leaving the box! I could hardly restrain my anxiety to be taken to the cave.

"You are sure of the location?" I said.

"Perfectly."

"I suppose others know it, of course?"

"No, you are the first one I have spoken to about it. I held it as a little secret of my own, thinking that some day the native might come back; but I have never seen him from that day to this."

"It is a wonder that others have not found it."

"Well, it is pretty well hidden—that is, the real opening to the cave. Of course the hollow in front is only covered with volcano grass and

ferns, and anyone is likely to stumble on that. The opening to the inner cave, as it might be called, is very narrow and tortuous. The last time I entered it the opening had become still narrower."

"How was that?"

"Because there is almost continual change here in the crater. Old fissures are sometimes closed up and new ones appear."

"I see."

My companion pointed with his cane, and said, "There where you see the bold bluff, just under it is the cave."

I looked about and the surroundings tallied exactly with Kolo's description, also with the description on the map left by Victor Munn.

I longed to rush onward and enter the opening, and I restrained my impulse with great difficulty.

I became nervous and excited, and my companion noticed it.

"I believe," he said, "the noxious vapors are making you ill."

I was willing that he should think so, and I therefore did not undeceive him.

After a journey of great roughness during which we climbed and stumbled over great blocks and slabs of lava, and tripped—at least I did—over many a fissure, we at last stood before the

recess under the bold bluff. "What is there beyond this?" I said to myself. "Is the treasure still there, or are we to meet a bitter disappointment?"

I stepped forward and pushed aside an overhanging bush.

"It would be useless to attempt to enter at night," said my companion. "It is difficult enough in the daytime."

Reluctantly I gave up the idea of entering the treasure-cave that night.

"Come," said my companion, "we must go; see, it is clouding up. I believe we shall have rain. It is getting darker every minute. We must hurry and get out of this. The fumes are something horrible at times."

He led the way across the floor of the volcano until we came to a sloping rocky way that twisted in and out amongst jagged ledges and distorted crags of lava. Upward we mounted, leaping from rock to rock, and laying hold of any piece of vegetation that offered to aid us in our toilsome climb.

The rain began to fall ere we reached the top or edge of the crater. Looking back, I noted well the path by which we came, until I felt perfectly sure that I could find it again. A dense steam now arose from the pit, dashed here and there

with the glare of volcanic fires. It was truly unearthly in its weird ghostliness? Once on top, and our way was pursued without difficulty. We soon reached the public house of the village, and my companion invited me to his room to show me some curiosities that he had there. I went with him, and while I was interested in what he showed yet I was full of impatience for the morning, so that I might put my knowledge to the test.

"Here is the box that I found," said my companion, coming from a closet and holding in his hands a dark-looking affair that on close examination proved to be a fine piece of cabinet work curiously inlaid with bone and pearl in an exceedingly intricate design.

I took it in my hands, and a strange thrill shot through me. I looked at it closely.

"A beautiful specimen of old Tagalog work," said my companion, pointing out its great beauties.

"It is indeed," I replied. "I would give a good deal to be the owner of it."

"Well, I have several specimens of this ancient work; and, if you greatly desire it, why, it is yours."

"Well!" I cried in great surprise, "I could hardly expect that!"

"Oh, that's all right!" he replied laughingly.

"You are exceedingly kind," I said diffidently; "there is—well I—I have a reason for wanting this, and perhaps some day I may be able to tell you why."

"A present for someone, perhaps," said my companion, looking at me quizzically.

I made no reply, not wishing to continue the conversation in that direction, but opened the box and examined its interior, which was divided into several compartments.

"And this is the box you found in the cave after the native disappeared?" I said, peering into the box.

"Yes," was the reply.

"And you never saw him again?"

"Never."

"Do you suppose it belonged to him?"

"Well, of course, I could not say. I think it likely though that it did."

"What do you suppose a box like this was used for?" I asked, for I was determined to learn all that I could from my companion.

"Well it is likely that the box or casket belonged to some chief, and in it he probably kept his trinkets."

"I wonder what trinkets they could have had?"

"The ancient chiefs used to have a monopoly

of the piracy of the coast, and very likely this box has held gems of almost priceless value."

After thanking my companion for his kindness, I went to the room that had been assigned to Don, Oliver, and myself, taking the box, wrapped up in paper, with me.

"Hello!" cried Don as I entered the room, "where have you been?"

I gave an evasive reply, although I was nearly consumed with a desire to tell my two brothers all that I had learned; but as I had a little scheme on hand that I wanted to put through alone, I withheld saying anything about my little trip in the crater of the burning mountain.

"By Jove! what have you there?" put in Oliver, coming to me and laying his hand on the packet which contained the box.

"Oh, it's nothing!" I replied, with an assumption of carelessness that I was far from feeling.

"I believe you have found the diamonds! You have got them in that package!" cried Oliver.

"Oh, no, I haven't!"

"Honest Injun?"

"Honest Injun!"

They bantered me until we all prepared to retire; soon they were sound asleep. Not so with myself. I was too full of my project to fall

asleep quickly, but I did get a few hours of needed rest.

I awoke early. My brothers were still sleeping soundly. I dressed hastily and quietly left the house. I walked rapidly along the route I had gone over the night before, and soon arrived at the spot where I must descend to the floor of the volcano by the rough and jagged route we had so toilsomely climbed after the cave had been pointed out to me.

The rain had ceased during the night, and the air was beautifully clear and pure, although somewhat chilly. Carefully I picked my way down the jagged path, and I had one or two narrow escapes from falling, but I saved myself by seizing the growth of grasses and ferns that lined the path.

In safety I reached the bottom, and took my course toward the cave. It was a hazardous thing to do without a guide, and I have often since wondered at my temerity, but I was so bent on attaining my object that I never once dreamed of any possible danger.

The floor of the crater was still in semi-darkness, though there were places lighted up by the glare from some small fiery lakes in the vicinity. I felt terribly lonesome down there, but I gave but little time to the indulgence of my feelings. I

hurried on as fast as the nature of my surroundings would permit me.

Once I tripped by catching my heel in a crevice, and I went sprawling at full length. I just saved myself from plunging into a smoothly boiling rivulet of melted lava that oozed from the lake of fire near by, by grabbing a block of lava that was still so hot that I let go of it almost the same instant that I touched it. But that touch was sufficient to stop my momentum, and I picked myself up thankful that it was no worse.

Going on, I eventually reached the sloping wall of the crater. There were so many places that looked like the cave opening, that at first I was puzzled. This did not last long, for I shortly struck the right spot, and soon I found the opening, after bending aside the growth of brush there. And lo! there was a white rock with a "cat's-eye" set in it!

In a quiver of excitement I forced my way through a narrow opening in the rock by getting face downward. I had brought a small lamp along with me, and this I lighted. I held it out in the gloom ahead of me, and looked about. I found there was plenty of room overhead and that I was lying on the floor of the cave.

I crawled in and stood upright. It was a fair-sized place, with rough and jagged walls of vol-

canic origin, and the floor was tilted in all directions, so that walking about was not easy. I examined the place narrowly by the aid of my lamp. I scaled the sides of the cavern by clinging to first one jutting spur and then to another, looking for an opening. At last my search was rewarded by discovering, high up, a fissure that was quite wide—perhaps a foot or more—which appeared to go in but a short distance; but by persistent looking I saw that it made an abrupt turn. Forcing my body through this narrow opening, I emerged, after several sharp turns to the right and to the left, into a long winding passage whose sides and roof were covered with sharp pointed stalactites, and even on the bottom of this corridor—as it seemed to be—there were stalagmites; but these were not so pointed. I went along this for some time, when the whole passage-way ran upward at a very steep slope. It was a very toilsome journey up this incline, and several times I bumped my head against the roof of the passage. At the head of the incline two other passages branched out, one to the right the other to the left.

At a venture I took the corridor on the right, and soon I came to a good-sized widening out of the passage into which there streamed a beam of light. I pushed on through this until I came to

a place where the floor pitched downward at a very steep angle. I flashed the rays of my lamp about, and saw gigantic slabs and rough squares of volcanic rock thrown about promiscuously. Great heaps were piled up here and there, and single pieces lay scattered all about.

In one corner of the room, as it might be called, there was a large table-like piece of stone and on it I saw a collection of curious-looking implements. My curiosity led me on to see it close by. Cautiously I picked my way downward over the masses of stone until I stood by the great stone table. I shouted for joy, for there lay the great Diamond Treasure!

CHAPTER XXII.

A STRANGE MEETING.

I STOOD in wide-eyed astonishment gazing at the beautiful spectacle when I heard a noise that startled me. Hastily I gathered up the gems and thrust them into my pocket. Then I darted away and hid behind a great stone. I put out my light and waited.

Soon a light appeared, and three men came into the place by an entrance other than the one by which I had come.

By the light, held high above their heads to permit its rays to penetrate the chamber, I saw three men I never dreamed of seeing again. They were Pando Kolo, Cal Bender, and the latter's companion.

To say that I was astonished conveys but a faint idea of my real feelings. A hundred thoughts chased through my brain. How did they get here? Had the Kahu played false? Should I be discovered, what would be my fate? How was it going to end? My chain of thought was broken when I saw them prepare to descend.

I crouched close to my sheltering rock and watched them as they came down. Kolo was first to reach bottom, and he rushed toward the stone table. A blank look came over his face as he stood there, and I immediately divined its cause: he knew the diamonds had been there—probably abandoned by him in his fright at his former visit. I felt sure now that it was none other than Kolo whose strange doings had been described to me the night before by my companion.

“Have you got the beauties?” cried Cal Bender, scrambling down as best he could. Pando Kolo remained silent. He was utterly dazed.

“I say!” shouted Bender, taking the native by the shoulder and shaking him, “have you got ’em?”

The Tagal turned a stony stare at his questioner.

“Don’t play me false!” yelled Bender; “none of your heathenish tricks now!”

“They are gone!” gasped Kolo, recovering his voice at last. “Someone steal them away, mebbe those t’ree American boys.”

“If you aint a-lyin’, that’s who’s got them!” yelled Bender, crazy with rage and disappointment. “I’d like to catch ’em,” he went on. “I’d wring their necks for ’em!”

I crouched closer to the rock and drew out my pistol, ready to defend myself should I be discovered; for I doubted not that I should be roughly handled and probably killed by the three men, now wrought up to such a point that they would hesitate at nothing.

"A fine state of affairs this is," said Bender after he had searched around. "Here I've promised the boys aboard the yacht that brought us over that I would pay them well for stowing us aboard the boat. What chance do I stand now of getting away from this cursed place? They'll laugh at me and curse me!"

I understood then how they had come over, but how Bender escaped from jail I never learned.

The three men lingered and seemed loath to leave the chamber. They searched around in a vain effort to find the jewels.

"Are you sure they were here?" snarled Bender.

"Yes, oh, yes!" replied Kolo. "I dropped the box on the table the last time I was here, and the diamonds roll out. Then Bili give a great cry of anger and the rocks move, and I think sure I be killed and I run from the place."

"Why didn't you take the diamonds with you?" asked the sailor who was Bender's chum.

"I was afraid," replied the Tagal.

"Afraid of what?" snapped Bender.

"Of Bili, the Fire-God."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Bender in disgust.

"He very angry that time," said Kolo, looking around nervously, while his fingers twitched.

"You say they were in a box!" howled Bender. "Where is the box?"

"I so 'fraid, I take the box an' leave the diamonds. When I get near the outside I drop the box too. I very much afraid—Bili very angry with me."

"Well," said Bender finally, "let us get out of this."

"There's another way to get out," said the native.

"Well, show us the quickest way to get out of this cursed hole."

Pando Kolo led the way up the rocky sloping side, and Cal Bender and his chum followed. I watched them until they disappeared into a narrow passage-way nearly opposite to the one by which I had entered; there I made haste to get away after I felt sure that they would not hear me.

I lighted my lamp and flew along the corridors with all the speed I could. A low rumbling sound underneath startled me. I could hardly repress the involuntary exclamation of terror and

surprise that escaped from my lips, as the sound was repeated. I hurried along still faster. A sudden explosion nearly threw me off my feet. The rocky walls and floor shook and trembled in a way that inspired me with additional fear and anxiety. It seemed to me that the last hour had come. As I sped on the detonations became louder and more frequent.

When I came to the space where the passageway widened out, and which I mentioned before, a great surprise awaited me. There stood Don and Oliver.

"Let us get out of this as quick as we can!" I shouted, rushing on ahead.

"Stop!" yelled Don. "You can't get out that way; the entrance is closed!"

"How so?" I cried, stopping short.

"The earthquake has jammed the rocks together," answered my brother in great excitement.

"I believe we are lost," said Oliver, "unless we can find some other way out."

For a moment I was appalled; the situation was absolutely terrifying. Loud, ominous sounds reverberated along the walls and at our feet. The floor lifted slightly in some places and sunk down at others.

"You are absolutely sure we cannot get out by

the entrance?" I gasped, as I thought of our dreadful predicament.

"We have tried," answered Oliver, "and it is impossible."

"Then follow me!" I screamed, dashing back along the way I had come, while unearthly sounds filled the air.

Don and Oliver wanted to question me, but I told them hastily that there was a possible chance for us at the other end—I thought that I might stumble on the path that Kolo and his companions had taken.

When we reached the chamber where I had found the diamonds on the rough stone table, the noises ceased; and I quickly informed my brothers of what had taken place there. Joy and surprise were mingled with fear for our safety and terror at the prospect of being entombed alive.

"We must be prepared for the rascals," said Don, drawing his pistol and advising us to do likewise.

We mounted the rough sloping wall and quickly entered the passage taken by Kolo. Along this we hurried, expecting every moment to face our enemies.

Suddenly there arose on the silence a loud whistling sound that increased in strength and shrillness as we proceeded; I thought my ear-

drums would burst with the infernal noise. A terrific booming sound succeeded it and the rocks in our rear crashed together with a crunching noise that was truly horrible. We were all too terrified for words; not a sound escaped our lips as we pressed onward.

A sharp crashing sound just ahead, followed by a great glare of light, brought us to a standstill. Before us was a great yawning pit from which arose jets of steam and flashes of fire. In the glare we saw the forms of Kolo and the others. They were rushing about in a panic of fear.

The pit was about fifteen or twenty feet deep with steep jagged sides that ran up to the edge and terminated in a comparatively level space several feet wide. We ran around the edge to an opening that showed black in the glare from the pit.

"We ought not to abandon these men!" I exclaimed as we were dashing into the opening.

Don and Oliver looked grave. "It's inhuman," I went on excitedly, for I dreaded to go away and leave them.

"What can we do?" asked Don.

"I don't know, I am sure, but let us try something."

"We will be suffocated; come on!" yelled Oliver,

"No, I'm going back," I shouted, suiting my action to my words.

"Hey, you down there!" I screamed, when I got to the edge of the pit. "Come this way; there is a good path here."

Not one of the three seemed to hear me. I shouted again; and Don and Oliver, who had followed, joined in the cry.

"They are dazed by the glare and the gases," said Don.

"Don't do that, Frank!" shouted Oliver, as I started to pick my way downward.

"I must," I replied, continuing my descent. I had gone down but halfway when Bender espied me and gave a loud shout of joy and astonishment which somewhat aroused both Kolo and the sailor. They saw me, and all staggered toward me. I reached out my hands to help them, when there was a tremendous roaring sound and the bottom of the pit rose and fell like a violently agitated sheet of water. Rock crashing against rock filled the place with sounds of destruction. A great glare of light fell around with a lurid glow that tinged the projecting rocks and ledges with an unearthly glamour.

"Come back!" shouted Don, reaching down to aid me.

I scrambled up just in time to avoid a great

mass of stone that fell down from the roof, thus making an opening that let in a sight of the blue sky. Never was my joy greater than then when the light from above streamed down upon us. We shouted for joy, although we were still in a perilous position.

Volumes of steam arose from the pit, and we never saw Kolo nor the others again. Flashes of fire darted up through the vapor and sounds that resembled thunder rolled along under our feet. The rock began to crumble where we stood, and we leaped from place to place, laying hold of projecting ledges and scrambling upward toward daylight.

That ascent was the most fearful and perilous it was ever my lot to undertake; but with life as the stake, our strength seemed doubled. Upward we forced our way through stifling gases and blinding vapors. Our clothes were torn into tatters, and I was extremely fearful of losing the diamonds; but, as good fortune would have it, I found them—or rather my pockets—intact, when we reached the top of the opening. Hardly had we scrambled out when a shower of stones followed us. With all speed we hastened away to seek shelter.

When we looked around we found ourselves on the floor of the volcano. This surprised us some-

what, for we had thought that the cave extended under the bluffs at the crater's edge; but in this we had been mistaken, for it was plainly evident that it went under the floor of the crater, and we had been deceived by the frequent windings of the various passages.

"Hurry!" yelled Don; "we must get out of this as quickly as possible."

We hardly needed the warning, for the floor of the volcano began to heave and crack like the breaking up of ice in the streams when spring sets in.

We sprang over fissures and avoided jets of flame and steam in our onward course to the edge of the volcano. Dripping with perspiration, we climbed the rocky, precipitous side, and at last we stood on top, safe.

Oh, what a relief it was! In very exhaustion we sank down in a bed of ferns and grasses. When we had somewhat recovered from our violent exertions, and our breathing became more regular, we began to talk over the situation.

"You are sure the diamonds are all right, Frank?" said Don, getting up on his feet.

Before answering, I put my hands in my pockets to see if they were still there. I drew forth both hands well filled with the gems and held them toward both of my brothers.

"My! but they are beauties!" exclaimed Don, examining them closely.

"Why, you hold a fortune in each hand!" cried Oliver in great glee.

"Yes," I said, "and there are others."

"Well," said Don, when I had replaced the diamonds, "we are the only ones that know of their existence now, and I think we shall have but little more trouble. Pando Kolo, Cal Bender, and the sailor have gone to their last judgment. But say, Frank, wasn't there a box?"

"Yes," I replied; "it is in our room at the village hotel. I brought it in last night."

"Well, you are sly!" put in Oliver. "How did you get it?"

I explained to my brothers how I had obtained the box.

"Sure the gentleman doesn't know about the diamonds?" questioned Don.

"No," I replied, "he knows nothing about them."

"Well, let us get back to the hotel and we'll introduce the diamonds and the box to each other after their long separation," said Oliver, laughing pleasantly.

As we moved away from the spot a man darted out from behind a clump of bushes that grew beside a pile of stone. He ran away at the top of

his speed and was soon lost to view behind a hill-ock of lava covered with dense vegetation.

Don ran after him a short distance, but soon gave up the chase.

“Who was he?” cried Oliver, as Don came up to us.

“I don’t know. I could not make him out.”

“Perhaps it was Alfredo Boez!” I exclaimed, as a suspicion of the Spaniard suddenly entered my mind.

“By Jove, that’s so!” exclaimed both of my brothers.

CHAPTER XXIII.

I GET INTO TROUBLE.

WE went on until we reached our room in the village hotel. Of course our tattered condition attracted some attention, and we had to narrate our adventure; but, you may be sure, we omitted any mention of the treasure.

After securely locking the door of our room, and getting out the treasure box, I proceeded to empty my pockets of the precious diamonds, putting them into their ancient receptacle.

"We will have to keep a sharp lookout for that tricky Spanish scoundrel," said Don. "He is somewhere about, and we can't be too careful."

"That's right," put in Oliver; "he ought to be shot on sight."

"True enough," I said, "but what is the best thing to do with the diamonds for the present?"

We discussed various plans, but could arrive at no satisfactory conclusion for some time. Finally Don suggested that we leave the box in our room and one of us should always remain there with it. To this we agreed.

After a while Don and Oliver went out, leaving me alone with the treasure. Shortly after they had gone there was a knocking at the door and I cried out, "Who's there?"

"It is I, your companion of last night," came the answer.

Recognizing the voice, I advanced to the door to admit my visitor—after hastily shoving the treasure-box under the bed.

"Come in," I said, throwing open the door.

Advancing into the room, my visitor said that he had heard of the adventure of myself and my companions, and he had come to congratulate me on my narrow escape.

We both sat down and had a long conversation, which was quite interesting to me, for my visitor was an excellent talker and a man of education.

"Oh, by the way," he said carelessly, "will you kindly let me see the box that I gave you last night? It has a peculiar design on it, and I should like to look at it once again."

For the moment I was nonplused. I grew suspicious of my visitor. How much did he know? Was it a device on his part to find out something? I regretted that I had placed the diamonds in the box.

"I am sorry, indeed," I said, "that I cannot

show you the box just now; but if you will call this evening I will cheerfully show it to you."

"Oh, it doesn't matter very much," said he carelessly, "only I thought I should like to see it once again before you go; I suppose you leave here very shortly?"

With this he arose and went away.

When I was alone again I went over our conversation, and there were many things that I recalled only to have my suspicions made stronger. Don came in then, and I detailed the whole affair to him.

"Perhaps he is in with that scoundrel Boez," suggested my brother. "We shall have to keep our eyes open."

"Yes, but how could Boez know anything about the diamonds?" I questioned doubtfully.

"I don't know of course, Frank; but there is something strange about this business that makes me feel that these two men are mixed up together in some way, and I shall keep a sharp lookout on them. Now why should Boez have attempted to kill me at the falls?"

"Of course that was mighty bad."

"And then still more, why did he try to kill you while you were in the canoe with the girl?"

"I think he did that in sudden rage," I replied; "the fellow was beside himself."

“Well, it looks to me like a preconcerted plan,” said Don doggedly; and though I tried to argue him out of the notion, yet he stuck to it persistently. As I have said, I was suspicious, but there were several things that were not clear to me. How did that treasure-box come into the possession of the man if he did not find it in the cave? Or was it just a hoax on his part? But then—well, it was all a puzzle, no matter how I looked at it.

“I am going out, Don,” I said, after I had hauled the box from under the bed, “and you want to guard these well.”

“Never fear, Frank; no one shall get them while I’m here.”

Leaving the house, I strolled along until I came to a rough canyon in which grew a lot of beautiful ferns and wild flowers. The delightful appearance of the place attracted my attention, and I stopped to admire it. Going into the canyon or gorge, I seated myself on a large rock beneath a great overhanging bush of dense luxuriance.

I was ruminating on various things when my attention was attracted by the sound of voices. Peering through the foliage, I was surprised to see Boez and the man who had given me the inlaid box engaged in close conversation.

A little to the left of where I then was ran a path to the top of the gorge. Cautiously screening myself from observation by means of the dense foliage in the gorge, I crawled to the top and made my way along the edge until I came to where I could look down on the Spaniard and his companion.

I lay down flat in the undergrowth, and peeping down over the edge I listened. Now, while I do not approve of eavesdropping under ordinary circumstances, yet in this instance I felt perfectly justified in the act.

"Do you think they have the diamonds?" I heard Boez ask.

"From their actions I should say that they have," replied his companion.

"Why did you not get them?" asked the Spaniard, in a fierce voice. "I sent you word after the sailor—his name was Bendair—tried to enlist me in the scheme. I did not place much confidence in his story, but I did not want the chance to slip by if there was anything in it. And now the diamonds are gone!" The Spaniard gritted his teeth in wild rage and stamped the ground viciously.

"You should have sent me word sooner," said Boez' companion.

"I sent you word as soon as I could, when I

learned the story from Bendair at Manila. Morales met me the same morning when I came over by the sailing-vessel, and he said that you had located the treasure-cave. Why did you not get the diamonds then?"

"I could not find them. I went in, and all that I could find was an empty box."

"What did you do with the box?"

"I gave it away."

"Why?"

"I will tell you."

With these words the man bent down close to Boez' ear, and I could not hear what was said; but I had no doubt that he was explaining some scheme he had in mind in giving the box to me.

Then the Spaniard's countenance cleared, and he said, loud enough for me to hear: "The diamonds are in the box, then?"

"I'm sure of it."

"Well, Morales should be here. He promised to keep a good watch on the three Americanos."

A peculiar bird-like whistle or call sounded on the air, and the next instant I felt myself in the grasp of a strong pair of arms. I struggled with all my might to throw off my assailant, and I believe I should have succeeded in releasing myself had not Boez and his companion come on the scene—in answer probably to the bird-call.

"Ha!" yelled my old enemy. "You pig of an Americano, we have you now! Hold him fast, Morales!"

With that he sprang in and helped the fellow he had called Morales, and who was holding on to me with a tenacious grip.

I made another desperate effort to break away and succeeded. I started to run, but before I could avoid it I was tripped up by the other man, and went headlong down the declivity. My fall was not a hard one, but in rolling down my head struck a stone and I lost my senses.

When I regained consciousness I found myself in a narrow room lying on a low cot. My head pained very much. Gazing around, I found the walls of the room to be of stone. There was but one small window that let in light and air; and this was guarded by a stout wire-netting. Near the door of the room sat a man with a pistol in his hand. I looked at him for some time, but he said not a word until I spoke to him.

"What is the meaning of this?" I demanded, attempting to arise from the cot.

"You must keep quiet," said my jailor.

"You have no right to detain me!"

"No!" he answered sneeringly.

"You shall pay dear for this!" I cried, getting angry at the insolence of the fellow.

"I think you shall pay dear for this yourself, my friend—it is the only way in which you can escape."

"What do you mean? Am I held for a ransom?" For I began to realize what Boez intended to do. He was going to hold me until Don and Oliver should give up the treasure.

About an hour afterward Boez came to the door of the place, and he grinned at me hideously. He had a sheet of paper, a bottle of ink, and a pen in his hand.

"I want you to write a letter," he said, coming close to the cot.

"Well, I will not write it," I declared.

"You must! it is your only hope. If you do not——" He left the sentence unfinished, but a look at his face left no doubt as to his meaning. Then turning to my jailor, he said: "Morales, you may leave us for the present. But remain within call."

When we were alone, Alfredo Boez came close to the cot, pistol in hand.

"Take up the pen," he said, pointing to that implement as it lay on a little table drawn close to the cot. I picked it up and waited. "Now write what I tell you."

"To whom shall I address it?" I questioned in a quiet tone, for I deemed that I could get along

better, if I seemed to acquiesce in his scheme resignedly; but inwardly I was longing for a chance to throttle the scoundrel.

"To your brothers," he said impatiently.

"What do you wish me to write to them for? Surely you don't wish me to tell them where I am?"

Boez scowled darkly at me, and there was a dangerous gleam in his eyes.

"Tell them they must leave the box of diamonds in the shed at the rear of the house tonight. If they do, you shall be set at liberty. If they do not, you shall be—well, they will know."

"Surely," I said, looking the man squarely in the eyes, "you would not murder me! I have never harmed you! In fact, I have done you several good turns. You must know——"

Boez interrupted me with a fierce Spanish oath. "Yes," he cried, "you did me a good turn when you fired at me——" Then he stopped suddenly, only to go on by demanding that I instantly proceed to write what he wanted. I felt doubly sure then that it was this man who had attempted to smash me in the girl's canoe.

"Señor Boez," I said deliberately, and without noticing his threatening manner, "what makes you think we have a box of diamonds?"

"I know without any mistake. Morales saw

you take two handfuls of diamonds and show them to your brothers after you escaped from the cave? ”

This made it plain that it was not Boez, but his chum Morales, who escaped from Don when I showed the diamonds to my brothers.

“ And is Morales the man that jumped on me at the gorge? ” I asked, more as a means of gaining time than for any other reason.

“ Yes, the same.”

“ Well, who is the man that is stopping at the village hotel and who was so friendly with me? By George! Boez you are a good deal sharper than I thought you were. You are a pretty slick article, after all. It is a pity that you do not make better use of your talents. If you would devote yourself to legitimate business, you would surely succeed.”

The Spaniard's eyes glistened with pleasure, for I had succeeded in flattering his vanity, and of this he had a large supply.

“ I have a good head,” he said, swelling with vainly suppressed pride and gratification; “ I can plan like a general. If I had commanded the Spanish soldiers in the Philippines no dog of a Tagal would ever start a rebellion in the islands!”

The fellow became worked up to such a pitch that he began to strut up and down the narrow

room at an amazing pace. He threw his arms about wildly and shouted out imprecations at the top of his voice. I watched for an opportunity to get at him.

When he had turned his back for a moment I seized the small table and jumping from my cot I sprang nimbly as a cat after him. So softly did I approach him, and so rapid was my attack, that he felt the full force of the table on his head as I brought it down suddenly with crushing effect. Before he could recover, I tore his pistol from his grasp and leaped from the room.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ROBBED OF THE DIAMONDS.

I PULLED the door shut as I went out, and it closed with a spring latch. As I vanished Boez let out a shout, and then I heard running on the floor above. Feeling sure that this was Morales, who was waiting in case he should be wanted, I stopped for a second and looked about me. Just ahead was a stairway. I ran and crouched under it as Morales came down. It being somewhat dark there, he did not spy me, but ran on to the room that I had just deserted.

In an instant after he passed me, I mounted the stairway in great leaps. I bolted the door which was at the head of the stairs and darted through a hallway. At the end of this hallway was a door. The key was in the lock, and I quickly turned it. Opening the door, I found myself in a garden.

A path led away from the house, here and there bordered by thick bushes that offered good concealment. I quickly hid myself in a great clump

and listened. No one followed me. I looked about cautiously to get my bearings.

A great noise at the house attracted my attention. There were loud talking and wrangling. I listened a moment, and was about to fly, when I heard the voices of Don and Oliver. My heart gave a leap of joy, and I ran back to the house, from which, but a little while before, I had been so eager to escape.

"We demand admittance!" shouted Don in a fine rage.

"You cannot come in," answered a voice from the inside.

"Our brother, Frank Folsom, is in here," Don went on. "We were informed that he had met with an accident and had been brought here."

"It is not true," returned the voice from the inside.

By this time I had come close to the house and sung out to my brothers that I was there and in pretty good condition.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Don in great surprise when he saw me, and Oliver stood with a puzzled look on his face.

"What does this mean?" I demanded. "I have not met with an accident! Who told you I had?"

"Why, your friend at the hotel did. He said

that you were seriously hurt and had been taken here. He gave us minute directions so that we could find this place," said Don.

"Well, he is as big a scoundrel as Boez," I cried in great excitement, for I had begun to suspect that this was a trick of Boez' friend at the house to get Don and Oliver away under a pretext and steal the diamonds while they were gone.

"Why do you say that?" asked Oliver. "What has happened that has changed your mind in regard to him?"

I hastily explained that I had discovered that Boez and the man at the village hotel were confederates; and also that I had been held by them for a ransom.

Don and Oliver were amazed, and they were for attacking Boez in the house, but I interposed and said that the best thing that we could do would be to hurry back to the hotel to see if the diamonds were still there.

We hurried on to the hotel, dreading the worst. After all our trouble to get the treasure the prospect of losing it was hard to bear. We hardly said a word on that journey. We were all too busy with our own thoughts to say much. The man at the house, who had acted so friendly toward me at first, had probably done this to cheat Boez—he wanted the treasure for himself, and

had cheated his companions in crime by this maneuver.

Arriving at the hotel we ran up to our room. The door was locked. I had a slight hope then that perhaps we had not been robbed. Upon going in Don quickly advanced to the bed and grabbing covers and all in one strong grasp he raised them up.

"The treasure is gone," he said, with a gulp.

We stood looking at each other in silence. While we had expected it, yet now that it was an assured thing, we were as if struck dumb.

"We will follow the fellow to the ends of the earth!" cried Don, breaking the silence.

"We will," declared both Oliver and I.

"We must find out if anyone has seen that scoundrel leave the house," said Don, as he left the room and went downstairs, we following.

Diligent inquiry revealed the fact that the man had gone away about fifteen minutes after he had sent Don and Oliver on their quest for me. A native boy, who had just come in, informed us that he had seen a man, whom he had often seen at the hotel, going down a certain path, which he offered to show us, at a rapid walk.

"Here's a dollar for you, my little man!" cried Don with exultation, and handing the boy a

bright silver coin of that denomination. "Put us on the road at once."

The boy hurried away with alacrity, for the coin had infused him with notable vigor, and we had to quicken our pace to keep up with him.

We soon reached a path that led us away from the crater. Along this we flew with the boy in the lead. The path was bordered with grass and bushes, and as we ran along I spied something which caused me a shock of surprise.

"The treasure-box!" I cried, leaving the path and making toward a clump of bushes to the right. I soon had the box in my possession, but it proved to be empty—the scoundrel had probably thrown it away, not wanting to be encumbered by it. We were disappointed, of course, yet still the box showed that we were on the trail of the villain.

On we went with renewed vigor over rocky places, down precipitous slopes, and through tangled masses of undergrowth.

The native boy then informed us that he had seen the man last where we then were.

"Do you know the country around here?" questioned Don.

"Yes, very well; nobody can lose me here," replied the boy with a grin of pride.

"Very well, be our guide," said Don. "We

leave it to you; take us the way you think he has gone."

"I do the best," said the native, again starting on a run.

The scene grew wilder as we went on, and the way became steeper and rougher. At last we came to a deep and narrow gorge, at the bottom of which ran a noisy stream of water. The stream was about twenty feet below the top of the gorge and went dashing along over masses of stone imbedded in the bottom.

The chasm or gorge was about five or six yards wide, and the only way to cross it was by means of two sticks of timber laid close together from one side to the other.

The Tagal boy went over first and stood waiting for us to come over. Don tested the bridge before venturing on it, and we saw that it was perfectly safe. It would easily hold ten times our weight.

"It's all right," sung out Don. "Go ahead."

I stepped on the timbers and Oliver followed, then came Don. While we were hardly in the middle the timbers began to move and the native boy began to shout in great alarm and terror. Turning a little to see what caused the timbers to move, I was horrified to see a man on the bank that we had but just left trying to lift up and dis-

lodge the rude bridge. I hastened to reach the opposite side with all speed, crying out to my comrades to hurry.

From side to side the timbers were swayed, and I saw with alarm that they were gradually working away from their resting-place. The native boy sprang forward and tried to hold them down, but his efforts were hardly of any use. Our position was extremely perilous, for we could barely retain our footing, so violent was the movement of the bridge.

All this took less time than it takes to tell it, but everything that happened then is indelibly marked on my memory. Just as we neared the bank the timbers were lifted high on the other bank and shoved suddenly to one side. We all leaped and landed safe, while the timbers went crashing down into the chasm.

"Thank God, we're safe!" I cried.

Looking over then, we saw the fellow who had tried to kill us start to run away, when he was intercepted by a man who leaped on him with the ferocity of a tiger. Over and over they went, tearing at each other and raining down blow on blow.

"Well, this beats all!" exclaimed Don as we stood there, looking on in amazement at the scene enacting on the other side of the chasm.

"The newcomer looks like Boez!" I cried as I caught a good look.

"Yes," put in Oliver, "and the other fellow is the man from the hotel who stole the treasure."

"Boez may get the diamonds, after all," said Don gloomily. Then he suddenly drew his pistol and was about to fire at the two men, who by this time had rolled near the edge of the gorge.

"Don't do that, Don!" I cried in alarm.

"Why not?"

"I'd rather we lost the diamonds."

"Nonsense!"

"Yes, I would," I persisted, holding his hand so that he could not use his weapon.

"There they go!" yelled Oliver, as both men went toppling over the edge of the gorge.

We stood gazing in silent horror as the men went down. The man who had robbed us was caught by one of the timbers which had become jammed in the rocks below and, which stood at an angle pointing toward the top of the chasm. His clothing became entangled with the timber, and there he hung suspended with death staring at him from below. Boez had clutched wildly at the sides of the rocky gorge when he went down, but his efforts to save himself were vain. He struck his head on a projecting rock and tumbled

into the mountain torrent a limp and lifeless corpse.

The man on the stick of timber tried to wriggle around so that he could hold. He had just succeeded in doing this when the stick, loosened by his movement, came down with a crash, hurling him against the wall of the gorge. He gave a groan and ever thereafter was silent.

For a few minutes none of us could stir. The horror of the thing enthralled us. The waters in the gorge dashed and foamed over and around the two forms that lay there, a bird flew by singing on its way, and the wind blew softly, shaking the foliage in its course.

"We ought to bring the bodies up," said Don, breaking the silence.

"Yes, but how?" questioned Oliver. "If we had a rope we might do something."

"I can make a rope," said the native boy. We looked at him in a questioning way, and for answer he ran off into the dense growth of brush and vine near by.

Soon the boy appeared with an armful of creepers and vines and set hastily to work braiding and twisting them into a long stout cord. When he had finished the rope, we tested it and it proved to be very strong.

Selecting a spot where there was a series of

footholds, Don fastened the rope under his arms and then descended while we held on to the free end of the rope. Slowly and carefully we "paid out," and soon Don was at the bottom, resting on a broad flat rock that stood well out of the foaming eddying waters.

Calling to Don to brace himself, and telling us to hold tight, the boy went down the rope hand-over-hand, and was quickly on the rock below beside Don.

After considerable effort Don and the boy managed to get the body of Boez' confederate over on the rock where they had first landed. In this work the native boy's skill was of great service. He was perfectly at home amid the jagged rocks and swirling waters. Not a false or useless move did he make.

I suggested to Don that it was unnecessary to hoist the body to the top of the chasm, as he could just as well search for the diamonds down below. He agreed with the idea, and soon he was in possession of the treasure, which the dead man had placed in a money-belt buckled under his vest. My brother and the native boy then ascended, leaving both bodies there in the gorge.

CHAPTER XXV.

HOME AGAIN—CONCLUSION.

IT being impossible to return by the way we had come, because of the destruction of the foot-way, our guide, the native boy, set out on a path that would bring us to a bridge far down the stream where we might cross.

Going along, we discussed the events of the day and cleared up several points as to our various movements while we were separated. The diamonds we had replaced in their ancient receptacle, and I carried it with watchful eyes.

“What do you suppose the gems are worth?” I asked Don as we walked side by side.

“Anywhere from fifty to seventy-five thousand dollars,” replied Don positively.

“Phew!” I softly whispered. “It was worth coming for.”

“Indeed it was.”

We raised a shout of exultation and hugged the boy in a very delirium of joy that made his eyes sparkle with pleasure and excitement.

"Well done, my lad!" cried Don, holding his arm about the sturdy little fellow. "We will reward you well for this day's work."

"What you going to give me?" he asked with native frankness.

"Anything you like!" we shouted in chorus.

"Then give me a good horse," said the boy, whereat we laughed good-naturedly.

"You shall have the best on the island," said Don. And I will say right here that the promise was not forgotten, for shortly after, through the help of Captain Bartell, we purchased one of the finest animals in the shape of horseflesh that we could procure, and presented it to the boy. His pleasure and joy thereat were great.

We arrived at the village hotel safe and sound, and with the treasure intact. We stayed there only long enough to straighten out a bit and settle our bill. Sandy had our horses ready, and we dashed off gayly for Rumida, determined to run no more risks with the treasure than were absolutely necessary.

The distance between the burning mountain and Rumida was covered without mishap, and we were shortly after safely domiciled at the Rest.

Our first move on reaching Rumida was to store our treasure in some safe place, our next to learn how soon we could get back to Manila, for

we knew that was the only port at which we could find a vessel bound for the United States.

"We can't get back any too quick for me," said my oldest brother; and Don and I agreed with him.

"And what will Mr. Narcross say now?" I said, after a pause.

"I reckon he won't know what to say," said Don.

Curiously enough, now we had the great treasure none of us felt like remaining away from California any longer. What we would do when we got back would be another story. Certain it was, however, that we would not let our guardian abuse us again.

At the docks in Rumida we ran plump into Captain Bartell and Matt Capsan, both beaming with good-nature.

"Hullo!" cried Oliver; "what are you doing here?"

"I am going to Manila," answered the captain. "The mate's relatives have sold out their interest in the *Golden Rover*, and I am to have my command back just as soon as she returns to Luzon—which will be inside of two weeks."

"And where do you sail to?" I questioned eagerly.

"Back to San Francisco."

All of us boys were glad to hear this, and we arranged on the spot for passage with the captain. He said he would be delighted to have us along.

"But it's odd you didn't stay longer," he added. "Don't like the islands, eh?"

We held a consultation, and ended by taking the kind-hearted captain into our confidence. Of course he listened to our strange tale in amazement.

"It's like a fairy tale!" he cried. "But you lads deserve the treasure. I never saw pluckier American boys in my life."

We obtained passage back to Manila two days later, and once at the capital city we deposited the treasure in a bank for safe-keeping. Then there remained nothing to do but to wait for the return of the *Golden Rover*.

We spent our spare time in looking about the town, and in making excursions to Malolos, Malabon, and other points. At that time there was but little trouble between the natives and their Spanish masters, and nobody thought that the day was coming when Spain would cede the islands to the United States and that Uncle Sam would have to send over thousands of soldier boys to subdue the insurgents.

When the *Golden Rover* came into port a large number of her crew were discharged, and Cap-

tain Bartell formed a new crew, Matt Capsan being at the head of the crowd. Soon we sailed away, and so well did the crew behave that no trouble was had during all of the many weeks spent on the rolling Pacific.

It must be confessed that our hearts beat fast when we came into sight of the Golden Gate. To all of us it seemed as if we had been away an age instead of a few months.

Having left our treasure-box with a safe-deposit company in San Francisco, we called upon a Mr. Little, who had once been a warm friend to our father, and to this legal gentleman we told our tale from beginning to end, just as I have put it down in these pages. We asked Mr. Little if we could not compel Mr. Narcross to treat us better.

"Yes," answered the lawyer. "I will go up to Oceanville with you and see what can be done."

He was as good as his word, and that evening found us up at the ranch house. When Mr. Narcross met us at the door he was almost overcome with astonishment. He wanted to "dress us down" then and there, but a cold look from Mr. Little made him fall back and change his mind.

It is needless for me to go into the particulars

of the stormy interview that followed. Mr. Narcross speedily found out how wrongly he had acted, and ended by stating that he was willing to resign his guardianship. This suited us, and Mr. Little being willing, we chose him to serve in Mr. Narcross' place, moving the next day back to San Francisco, where we have lived ever since.

As our guardian, Mr. Little took charge of the Diamond Treasure, and sold the gems to a first-class wholesale dealer, who allowed him eighty thousand dollars in cash for them. Several of the small diamonds were kept, and we had one set in a gold stick-pin for honest Captain Bartell, who is still our warmest friend.

And now let me close my story, since the hunt has been brought to a successful end. Come what may, I do not believe that my brothers or myself will ever forget the thrilling adventures which fell to our lot while searching for the great Diamond Treasure of the Philippines.

THE END.



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